

THE ARTHURIAN POETRY

OF

TENNYSON

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

IN APPLICATION FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
JAMES MARTIN GRAY

APRIL 1961





THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

PAGE MISSING IN ORIGINAL

PREFACE

It is a curious fact of the recent scholarship inspired by the "return to Tennyson," that his Arthurian poetry, into which he put a lifetime's thought and skill, has been almost ignored. While a few articles have dealt with minor points, critics have been content to ignore these poems, particularly the Idylls of the King, as if they were literary fossils, efforts to put a superficial Victorian patina on the medieval Arthurian chronicles and romances. This critical neglect has meant that there is no clear idea of the extent and kind of the Arthurian sources upon which Tennyson drew.

I believe it is useless to assess Tennyson's Arthurian poetry until we take these sources into consideration, and accordingly the greater part of this thesis is taken up with their systematic examination. And my thesis as such is to show that Tennyson's rehandling of the sources is so extensive and comprehensive that it constitutes an original creation.

Within the scope of a work of this kind I cannot claim to have treated every aspect of Tennyson's Arthurian poetry exhaustively; but I hope the work I have done will make it easier for others to form a picture of the skill and insight with which Tennyson wrote, in order to present the legends in a suitable form, and not simply as idle tales.

This preface would not be complete without acknowledging the patient help given me by Dr. A.M. Clark, until recently Reader in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. He supervised the greater part of the thesis, and gave me the means of organising it.

J.M.G. Manchester, April, 1961.

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Introduction

As Tennyson's Arthurian poetry spans his lifetime, and as this is not simply a study of its evolution but also an account of its sources, I have organised the material into seventeen chapters, on the following lines.

My first chapter considers the Arthurian theme in English literature from the viewpoint of writers and critics from 1700 down to 1856, when Tennyson began his major Arthurian series. After this background study, in the second chapter I review his early Arthurian poetry, principally its sources and the uses to which these sources are put. Then in the third chapter I investigate first the poet's interest in the legend as a whole and the various manuscript notes he made when he considered beginning a large work on the legend. Following this I trace the

evidence to be found in memoirs and biographies for his continued interest in the Arthurian during the years he was writing other poetry. This interest culminated in his writing the first four Idylls of the King between 1856-59, and I indicate the evolution of these poems and the various changes of plan he made. Next I trace the various difficulties which prevented his continuing with his scheme, the modification of the scheme itself, and then his completing it on a scale larger than he had previously envisaged during the years 1868-1874.

In chapters four to fourteen I investigate systematically the sources for each of the twelve Idylls, and Tennyson's main omissions, alterations and inventions. The fifteenth chapter considers how he treated two of the most difficult aspects of the sources, the barbarous and the supernatural. In the penultimate chapter I review briefly the scale of his borrowings, the way he rearranged the order of the stories to fit his cycle, the methods adopted to give these separate poems some overall unity, and the developments in his treatment of sources as time went on, to meet the needs of his scheme. From the examination of his Arthurian poetry from these points of view, in the final chapter I sum up his Arthurian achievement, and ask for a reappraisal of these long-neglected poems.

CHAPTER I

The Background to Tennyson's Arthurian Poetry (1700-1856).

Before I discuss the handling of the Arthurian legend in the Romantic and Victorian periods down to Tennyson's concentration on it from 1856 onwards, I would point out certain facts. In the first place the legend in its most familiar and comprehensive form became accessible only in 1816, when two editions of the Morte d'Arthur of Malory were published. Still another edition of the same work came out the following year. Before these publications, readers had to rely on the scarce 1634 (Stansby) edition, if they knew of it and the whereabouts of a copy of it. Only one copy of the original Caxton publication was believed to exist at the time.¹ As far as the chronicles were concerned, neither Nennius's Historia Brittenum nor Layamon's Brut had been published in Britain at all, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae had been printed in 1587 and 1718.² The Welsh versions of Arthurian stories were even more difficult to obtain. None of the stories from the Mabinogion published before Lady Charlotte Guest's edition of the whole corpus between 1838-49 concerned King Arthur. Bearing this situation in mind, one is not surprised to find all the writers before the early

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1. Scott, writing to Southey about editing Malory's Morte d'Arthur in December, 1810, notes: "I am desirous to collate the ordinary edition Stansby with the only Caxton known to exist, and which belongs to Lady Jersey." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, Vol.II, p417 (Centenary Ed.1932)
 2. Vol.II of The Cambrian Register (1796) contained Geoffrey's Historia in Welsh, along with a translation, but this account was not commonly known.

years of the XIX century who use the Arthurian legend do so in a rather haphazard or incidental way. It is haphazard because the legend is known only by name, by the reputation of one or two characters, or by an incident in some isolated ballad. Thus the story of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, in so far as it is known at all, is merely referred to in passing, and it is frequently confused with Scandinavian mythology. In order to give very briefly an account of the revival of interest in the Arthurian story amongst the pre-Romantic and early Romantic writers, and to show the development in their understanding of the legend, I have found it best to break this prefatory examination into three parts: (1) The activities of antiquarians, editors, and critics down to 1856, (2) the actual use to which writers of the period put the legend,¹ and (3) a summary of the situation when Tennyson's interest in it developed.

My inquiry really begins with the Observations on the Fairie Queene of Spenser (1754, corrected and enlarged 1762) of Thomas Warton. Warton notes Spenser's debts to his predecessors, and in the first edition draws attention to his borrowings from Malory's Morte d'Arthur.²

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1. I have found M.W. MacCallum's Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story (1894) particularly useful for a historical survey of the main Arthurian writing down to the time of Tennyson, though MacCallum's account is not comprehensive.
 2. In a claim for better understanding of the past, Warton states that people should not rely purely on classical learning "but also acquaintance with those books which, though now forgotten and lost, were yet in repute about the time in which each author respectively wrote, and which it is most likely he had read." As D. Nichol Smith points out, in his British Academy Warton Lecture for 1929: "A long description of this book (Malory) had been printed a few years previously in Ame's Typographical Antiquities, but it is in Warton's Observations on the Faerie Queene that Malory makes his entrance into literary criticism.

The Observations acted as a stimulus to writers and antiquarians. Another work to do the same was Robert Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance published in the same year as Warton's enlarged edition. Hurd's book is perhaps the first real suggestion of the Romantic standpoint in English. His is the first coherent attempt to be relative in critical judgments, that is, to see each age, each style, in its proper perspective. He does not measure every work of literature, every attitude, by the Greek or Roman standard.¹ He points to chivalry as a natural growth, not as a fantastic invention superimposed upon the society from without, and draws attention to the chivalry of the Greeks and Romans. Apart from these important new attitudes, he makes a bold claim for freedom in writing,² and for experiment, and laments the narrowness of the literature of his day.³ Hurd's enlightened critical opinions undoubtedly stimulated the study of the neglected older literature.

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1. "When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules, by which when it comes to be examined, it is seen to have its merit, as well as the Grecian. The question is not, which of the two is conducted in the simplest or truest taste: but, whether there be not sense and design in both, when scrutinized by the laws on which each is projected." Letter VIII.
 2. The capable reader is best pleased "when he is made to conceive (he minds not by what magic), the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not, and never were likely to, exist." Letter X.
 3. "Thus at length the magic of the old romances was perfectly dissolved. They began by reflecting an image indeed of the feudal manners, but an image magnified and distorted by unskilful designers. Common sense being offended by these perversions of truth and nature, the next step was to have recourse to allegories. Under this disguise they walked the world a while.... but reason in the end drove them from the scene... and fancy was now constrained, against her will, to ally herself with strict truth, if she would gain admittance into reasonable company.... What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine fabling." Letter XII.

There are two other pioneer works to be considered before I review the activities of later literary antiquarians: - Bishop Percy's Reliques of English Poetry (1765), and Thomas Warton's History of English Poetry (1774-1781). Percy's collection was very popular, and four editions were published before the turn of the century. Its effect on the young Scott was overwhelming.¹ The third volume of the series contained several ballads and poems on the subject of King Arthur.² Warton's History, disproportionate, awkward as it is, was the first attempt to bring English literature into some order; and apart from drawing attention to much that would have been normally overlooked at the time³ it attempted to show continuity in the literary tradition. People were forced to cover all the ground, once Warton had started literary research, even if only to show how faulty the original work was. However, Warton's History acted as a further stimulus to antiquarian study, and slowly

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1. Scott, in his delight at receiving a letter from Bishop Percy in 1801, states in his reply it was equivalent to the delight he felt as a twelve-year-old in 1783 "when the Reliques of Ancient Poetry were first put into my hand, an era in my poetical taste which I will never forget." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. I, p108 (Centenary Ed. 1932).
 2. There are six ballads which concern the Arthurian legend: Sir Lancelot du Lake; The Boy and the Mantle; The Marriage of Sir Gawaine; King Ryence's Challenge; King Arthur's Death (a fragment); and The Legend of King Arthur. Moreover, in Appendix II of the Reliques, Percy, in an essay on the ancient metrical romances, gives a summary of Libius Disconius (sic), and lists 39 metrical romances, all that he knew were extant in his own day. His comment on Libius Disconius is interesting. It is "as regular in its conduct, as any of the finest poems of classical antiquity. If the execution, particularly as to the diction and sentiment were but equal to the plan, it would be a capital performance; but this is such as might be expected in rude and ignorant times, and in barbarous unpolished language."
 3. The History contains extracts from La Morte Arthure, Robert of Gloucester's verse account of Geoffrey's Historia, and Yvain and Gawain. There are references to Wace, Layamon (one), to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and one (in a footnote) to Malory.

the legendary riches of the old manuscripts were uncovered. With Percy and Warton's lead and with a developing interest in Welsh, Scots, and Irish ballads and legends, it is not surprising that in the last quarter of the XVIII century there was an enormous activity amongst writers and antiquarians;¹ and by the time of Tennyson's birth though research had not reached the critical accuracy of the later XIX century, a fair estimate of the literary past had been made. Most of the old texts and what survived in the oral tradition had been noted.

Percy's work in making older literature known, through his Reliques, his translation of Mallet's L'Introduction a L'Histoire de Dannemarc entitled Northern Antiquities (1770), and the work of various Scots, Welsh and Irish antiquarians² was furthered by the work of Ellis, Ritson, and, above all, the popularising work accomplished by Scott. The two works of Ritson's which contributed to a better understanding of Arthurian legend, were the Ancient English Metrical Romancees,³ 3 vols (1802), and the posthumous Life of King Arthur (1825). The first published together twelve metrical romances,³ preceded by an important dissertation

1. In the Celtic Revival in English Literature 1760-1800, (Harvard 1923), E.D. Snyder points out (pl4) that "an important treatise dealing with Celtic mythology was printed practically every year from 1760-1800." While this was not directly Arthurian, nevertheless such an impetus would uncover Arthurian material, and lead to an interest in the legend generally.
2. Particularly, in Wales, the pioneer work of Lewis Morris and the publications of Evan Evans and Edward Jones; in Scotland Pinkerton, Laing, Leyden and Scott; and in Ireland Charlotte Brooke.
3. Of the twelve metrical romances, the first three: Ywaine and Gawin; Launfal; and Libeaus Disconus are Arthurian; and in the comprehensive notes to each legend full accounts are given in Ywaine and Gawin on Arthur, Guinevere, Modred and Kay in various different romances. In the notes to Launfal, Percival, Lancelot and Merlin are discussed; and the Round Table in Libeaus Disconus.

on romance and minstrelsy; and the second collected as much as it was possible to obtain about the historicity of King Arthur, and devoted much space to discrediting Geoffrey of Monmouth. Three years after Ritson's Romances appeared Ellis's Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances (1805), which was intended to supplement an earlier publication.¹ He divides the romances into six groups, of which the first is Arthurian romance, and in this first section he gives examples from Merlin and a metrical Morte Arthur (Harleian MS.2252), really an account of the adventures of Lancelot. He also provides summaries of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia and Vita Merlini, and the plots of such Lais of Marie de France as had not been previously translated into English.

Ritson and Ellis are particularly interesting because of their method of approach to the texts. Ritson's method was an exact scholarship, in which every variant of a text was noted, every emendation he made recorded, the authority that had led him to make the emendation quoted, and if the work was a fragment, or lacked completion, a comparison was made with more complete editions or manuscripts. He also provided a glossary to the work. This care was particularly necessary after various renovators, imitators, forgers and popularisers such as Mickle, Macpherson Percy, Pinkerton and Chatterton had been at work. Ritson's Romances are still today a model of careful scholarship. Ellis, on the other hand, gave the plots or stories of the legends in a short, readable form, and from the frequently enormous metrical romances he extracted the parts

1. "The following volumes are intended to supply a chasm in the Specimens of Early English Poets, by explaining more fully the progress of our poetry and language, from the latter part of the thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century; and to exhibit a general view of our romances of chivalry, in their earliest and simplest form". Ellis, Specimens, introduction.

best calculated to interest his audience. His intention was to popularise the legends, not, as Percy, by perfecting or completing ballads, but by selecting matter interesting to his contemporaries, and by writing in a wry semi-humorous manner that enlivened what would often have been tedious¹

A year before the turn of the century Sharon Turner issued the first volume of The History of the Anglo-Saxons (1799), which was the first attempt to relate together all historical documents about Anglo-Saxon England, in much the same manner as Gibbon had done for the late Roman Empire. Chapter V of Book II (I pp224-252) is devoted to a discussion of the historicity of Arthur.² It also deals with his legendary exploits.

A 26-page appendix gives details of Arthur, Merlin, and the Round Table.

1. Two extracts amply illustrate his manner: "Merlin... made Arthur amends by procuring for him an interview with the fair Lyanor, daughter of a certain Earl Sweyn, a damsel who had repaired to the king for the purpose of doing homage, and thus incidentally obtained the honour of giving birth to a son who was afterwards a knight of the Round Table." Specimens I, 256, or: "Gawain, singling out a king called Choas, who was 14 feet high, began the battle by splitting him from the crown of the head to the breast. Galachin encountered King Sangran, who was also very huge, and cut off his head. Agravain, having no kings immediately within his reach, amused himself with the necks of plebeians which he cut through by dozens at a time, till he formed a circle of dead bodies to his satisfaction." I, 264.
2. Turner, in his Introduction, explains why he has dealt with Arthur: "Of the great Arthur, so much has been fabled, and so much has been denied, that it was impossible to pass over his actions in silence. It is now beyond our power to give his history in luminous detail. As far as the Author could safely venture, he has advanced, and he has separated the Arthur of tradition from the Arthur of history. He thought it was interesting to have some of the traditions preserved, which were not only esteemed, but credited by former ages, and he has therefore inserted them in the Appendix. If they should be found to be beneath the notice of the literati, they might be serviceable to some British Virgil." Introduction vi. Turner, at any rate, had no doubt about the literary possibilities in the Arthurian legend. According to T.P. Cross, MP XVIII (1924) p488-9, Tennyson was acquainted with Turner's work, and utilised the saying "In short God has not made since Adam was, a man more perfect than Arthur" (quoted Memoir I 194 and II 128) from Turner.

Another historian to take up the Arthurian legend was Scott. His early antiquarian labours produced the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802). In this collection of ballads the Arthurian legend is touched on once, in a discussion regarding the historicity of Thomas (the Rhymer) of Ercildoune, whose prophetic powers associated him with Merlin. Scott gives a ballad in three parts, the first part being an authentic relic, the second Scott's own addition enshrining Thomas' recorded prophecies, and the third an invention of Scott's own, relating how Thomas sang to lords and ladies of the deeds of Arthur and his knights, and how he eventually disappeared into fairyland. It is quite clear that Scott's reason for adding to the traditional ballad, was to popularise, or at least make better known, both the semi-legendary Thomas and the Arthurian story. This attitude to antiquity is seen in his Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry appended to the Minstrelsy edition of 1830, in which he agrees both with the exactitude of scholars like Ritson and with the modern adaptations and additions to ballads of Bishop Percy. In the Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad (1830) he also relates that an interest in ballads, stimulated partly by Percy and partly by the Germans, was the immediate reason for his entrance into the world of letters.¹

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1. "A period when this particular taste for the popular ballad was in the most extravagant degree of fashion, became the occasion, unexpectedly, indeed, of my deserting the profession to which I was educated, and in which I had sufficiently advantageous prospects for a person of limited ambition.... During the last ten years of the eighteenth century, the art of poetry was at a remarkably low ebb in Britain... The realms of Parnassus, like many a kingdom at the period, seemed to lie open to the first bold invader, whether he should be a daring usurper, or could show a legitimate title of sovereignty." Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad. (1830)

So, within five years of the turn of the century, two important collections of metrical romances appeared, complementary to one another, both giving the Arthurian material first place; the first comprehensive history of the Anglo-Saxons was in process of publication (1799-1804); and another collection, Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802) aroused a new interest amongst antiquaries, because his collection was not only national, but also regional.

It was not long before scholars became interested in republishing works long out of print, including Malory's Morte d'Arthur, and showed a wider interest in collections of Arthurian material. Significantly, the first real interest in making Malory's work more accessible is shown by Scott in his edition of Sir Tristrem (1805), a metrical romance of the thirteenth century, attributed to Thomas of Ercildoune. As the manuscript Scott worked from was incomplete, the end being torn away, he reconstructed an ending from a French version of the Tristram story, and he also printed at the end two ancient fragments of French metrical romances on Tristram. While he was engaged on this work he wrote to Ellis for advice; and in one of his letters he enquires about the Mabinogion, which Ellis had at one time meant to translate but which he was prevented from translating by sickness.¹ In a letter to Southey, November 1807, Scott mentioned his intention to republish the Morte d'Arthur, but he stated he had only the 1637 (sic) edition of Malory.

1. Scott to Ellis, 14 Sep. 1803: "I am very sorry you flag over these wild and interesting tales." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, (Centenary Edition, 1932), Vol. I, p202.

An edition of Malory was also Southey's intention and so Scott, with his customary generosity, offered any help he could give, though the project had been dear to his heart for a long time, and his editorial plans were quite different from those of Southey.¹ Southey's project was announced early in order to stimulate sales; and the undesired consequence was that another publisher put out an edition done anonymously entitled The History of the Renowned Prince Arthur. This two volume pocket edition, speedily prepared to beat Southey's projected edition, appeared under the imprint of 'Walker and Edwards', London 1816.² This was the edition Dr. Tennyson acquired for his library, and the one that Tennyson the poet carried round with him for years.³ The same year there was another edition of Malory (printed and published by R. Wilks).⁴ The

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1. Scott to Southey, Dec. 1807: "I am very glad the Morte Arthur is in your hands; it has long been a favourite of mine, and I intended to have made it a handsome book, in the shape of a small antique-looking quarto, with wooden vignettes of costume. I wish you would not degrade him into a squat 12 mo... If I can assist you in this matter, command my services." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott (Centenary Edition 1932) Vol. I, p401. And again (1809): "Don't tease yourself or Pater Noster about the Morte Arthur but take your own time. My idea was entirely different from yours, to print namely the whole from the only original Caxton which is extant with all the superstition and harlotrie which the castrator in the reign of Edward VI chose to omit. A classic of Henry VII's time is so valuable that I still think once you have been afloat for a year or two, I will give a very limited edition of Sir Thomas Mallory in his native dress. But this is a distant vision." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, (Centenary Edition 1932) Vol. II p236.
 2. In the Introduction the previous editions are noted, "after which no edition can be traced until that of 1634, of which the volume now before the reader is an exact reprint." By an 'exact reprint' the publisher meant an edition re-punctuated to suit modern taste, and the spelling modernised, so that much of the antiquity is erased. The later edition put out by the publisher Wilks claimed even greater accuracy, but was no better than its immediate predecessor.
 3. "In the field of romance, Dr. Tennyson's library contained the first modern reprint of the Morte D'Arthur (1816)" p32 Tennyson, by Sir Charles Tennyson (1949).
 4. Thomas Wright's edition of Malory (1858) attributes (Introduction xiii) the editing of the Wilks Malory to Joseph Haslewood.

following year appeared The Byrth, Lyf and Actes of Kyng Arthur (hereinafter referred to as Kyng Arthur), printed from Caxton's edition of 1485, and edited¹ with an introduction and notes, by Southey. This was the edition Tennyson frequently consulted, and whose notes he utilised when devising his own version of Arthurian story. The edition retained the antique spelling, but, because it aimed at a wide public, did not include the parts that the "castrators" excised during the time of Edward VI. There were no other editions of Malory until Wright's edition in 1858.

Over the next few years much Arthurian material appeared. Nennius's Historia Brittonum (with an English translation) first appeared edited by Gunn (London 1819), and it was also published by the English Historical Society edited by Stevenson (London, 1838), and a revision of Gunn's work and translation was published by Giles (London 1841). There was an edition of Nennius and Gildas by San Marte (Berlin 1844). Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae was edited by Giles (London 1844) and San Marte (Halle 1854). It had previously been printed in Paris, 1517, and London, 1718, and it also had appeared in Welsh, along with an English translation, in The Cambrian Register Vol II (1796), but was little noticed there. Nennius and Geoffrey were most accessible in Six Old English Chronicles edited by Giles (1848) for Bohn's Antiquarian

1. Note xviii on p lviii of the Introduction states: "It may perhaps not be improper to remark that the present edition was projected and undertaken by a gentleman, who, for reasons which it is not necessary to explain, withdrew from the undertaking. The present editor is not responsible for the mechanical part; nor is it to be supposed, that under any circumstances he would have undertaken such a responsibility, but he knows that neither expense nor care have been spared to render it minutely accurate."

Library. Geoffrey's Vita Merlini was edited by Michel and Wright, and published in Paris (1837).

Wace's Brut was first edited and published by le Roux de Lincy (Rouen 1836-38). Layamon's Brut was first edited and published by Sir Frederick Madden (London 1847). Before this time it had only received brief notices.¹ Stories from the Mabinogion had appeared sporadically, but none of the Arthurian stories in the collection were published until Lady Charlotte Cuest's admirable version of the Mabinogion in 1838-1849. I have put the more important Arthurian material which was available to writers in the mid-century, into an appendix (Appendix A). It is obvious from the dates of publication that the 1830's inaugurated a time of increased interest.

Now that I have considered the works of the antiquaries and editors, I should like to review very briefly the creative writers between 1700-1840 who made use of Arthurian legend, and in rather greater detail those who did so just before Tennyson made use of the theme. From the time of Spenser there was a steady decline of interest in King Arthur.

1. It is noticed in 1639, 1714 and 1748, and mention is made in Tyrwhitt, Ellis, Ritson, Mitford, Warton, Campbell, Turner and Conybeare, "yet its peculiar value in a philological point of view appears to have remained little known up to the period when the Society of Antiquaries determined on its publication." Madden, Introduction to Layamon's Brut (1847).

Milton had considered the subject as fitting for epic poetry, but later dropped it.¹ A curious compilation on Arthur, the work of the ballader Martin Parker, appeared in the year of the Restoration, and may have a political significance for this reason.² Dryden wished to use the theme in an epic, but eventually re-hashed it in an opera.³ It

1. The most comprehensive explanation seems to have been given by Roberta F. Brinkley: "Milton's rejection of the Arthurian legend is therefore, seen to be a far more complex matter than merely a distaste for fiction. His knowledge of the barbarity of the British, his recognition that any complete poetic expression of contemporary times would necessarily cover not only the glory of the Britons but also their degradation and would leave him without a triumphant hero, his interest in the great civilisation of the Saxons and especially in the laws which had figured so largely in recent history, his repudiation of the absolutism of the Tudors and Stuarts, who had used the Arthurian legend to strengthen their rights, and his attempts to show order in the universe and a divine plan which would explain the seeming mutability in its affairs - all these combine to lead Milton away from the story of Arthur and to center his choice upon the theme of Paradise Lost." R.F. Brinkley, The Arthurian Legend in the XVII Century (Baltimore 1932) p.141.
2. R.F. Brinkley first draws attention to this work. Oddly enough, in a book that shows much of the political implications behind the use of Arthurian story, she had no comment to make on the possible significance of the publication of this story, and it going through two editions in the year the Stuarts were restored.
3. The work was written originally to flatter Charles II, but work on it was delayed, and after the 'revolution' of 1688 and the decline in Dryden's fortunes he re-worked it as an opera entitled King Arthur, or The British Worthy (written 1690, acted and printed 1691) Merlin, or The British Inchanter and King Arthur, the British Worthy an opera 'altered' from Dryden's libretto by a Mr. Giffard, was published in 1736. Other plays of the period alluding to the Arthurian are noted in Appendix B.

The fact that Macready performed Dryden's work "with great splendour" in November 1842 (Thomas Price, Literary Remains (1855) Vol.I, 274), testifies to its continued success.

was left to Sir Richard Blackmore (-1729) to compose not one, but two epics on the theme, Prince Arthur (1695), and King Arthur (1700). The first has Virgil for its model. There seems to be nothing in it from Malory; but Arthur's battles with the Saxons, his march to London, and his victory over Ireland and Scotland show an acquaintance with Geoffrey's Historia. In King Arthur Blackmore felt he had to justify his use of Geoffrey.¹ There is political allegory behind both epics. The opinions of contemporary critics were generally caustic; but ordinary readers apparently enjoyed the works. It is not surprising that, after Blackmore's failure and in an age antipathetic in any case to things medieval, the eighteenth-century poets seldom adverted to Arthur. In fact the only considerable works alluding to a form of the legend during the next few years were Henry Fielding's two coarse satirical farces on Tom Thumb,² which are important, apart from the great novelist's pillorying of theatrical bombast, in showing how low the legend had sunk in popular esteem. In these farces Arthur

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1. "There was about the end of the Fourth, or the beginning of the Fifth Century, a King of Britain nam'd Arthur; a Prince of extraordinary Qualities, and famous for his Martial Atchievements, who succeeded his father Uter Pendragon, all our Historians agree; and the eminently learned Bishop of Worcester in his Origines Britannicae, do's acknowledge it. And tho' the above-cited Geofry of Monmouth is indeed a fabulous Author, yet his Authority, especially considering that there was such a Warlike Prince as Arthur, is a sufficient foundation for an Epick Poem" Preface to King Arthur (1700), Sir Richard Blackmore.
 2. Tom Thumb, A Tragedy (1730) revised as The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great (1737).

is reduced to an amorous mountebank and Merlin a conjuror.

One writer who adverted to the legend in a serious vein was Thomas Warton (1728-1790), the literary historian. He wrote two poems directly inspired by his knowledge of King Arthur in ancient literature, The Grave of King Arthur (1777), and Sonnet VIII, On King Arthur's Round Table at Winchester. There are also references to Arthur in Thomas Warton's On the Birth of the Prince of Wales (1762), and his Ode XIX: On His Majesty's Birth-Day (1787), and a reference to Merlin in his Sonnet IV (Written at Stonehenge). The Grave of King Arthur is a fine poem, particularly when we consider the time of its composition. The "Warton school of poetry" has had its admirers and detractors; but there is no doubt that Joseph Warton's and still more Thomas Warton's poetry must have contributed as much as their antiquarian labours to renew an interest in the past. Certainly, from a survey of the dates of the poems Thomas Warton composed, it shows he had a life-long interest in the subject of King Arthur.

The next person to consider the Arthurian legend as suitable for a large work was Richard Hole (1746-1803). His Arthur, or The Northern Enchantment (1789) is an extremely interesting work, because it is one of the best examples of an ambivalence towards romance in the transitional time before the Romantic Revival. In his Introduction he defends his choice of Arthur for an epic poem, and his imaginary treatment of him, even though Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia has been

utterly discredited.¹ Like Blackmore, Hole does not seem to be aware of Malory. His sources of inspiration are Macpherson's Ossian, and in his verse are found the influence of the Norse poetry of Gray and Mason.

Hole's intention was to imitate an old metrical romance "with some of its harsher features softened and modified." He subscribes to the perfection of the classics, however, "for nothing new, probably, can be added to improve the plan of the regular epic as conceived by Homer." Having thus stated his confused loyalties, he gives his reason for going to the Gothic..."the old Gothic fables exhibit a peculiarity of manners and situation, which, if not from their intrinsic excellence, may, from their being less hackneyed, afford more materials for the writer's imagination, and contribute more to the reader's entertainment."

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1. "The existence of the hero celebrated in the following Poem has been frequently controverted, on account of the fabulous exploits attributed to him; but certainly without sufficient reason. For is it not more natural to suppose that fiction erected her airy superstructure on some acknowledged truth, than, that a long-established opinion held as true, should be founded on the basis of fiction? But whether the extraordinary narrative of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the more consistent testimony of graver historians, outweighs or not the silence of Bede or Gildas, is of little consequence to the Arthur who now appears. He is merely an ideal personage; his achievements groundless and imaginary; not to be examined at the bar of historic truth, but of poetic credibility." Richard Hole, Introduction to Arthur, or The Northern Enchantment. (1789).

Instinct having thus overcome reason, Hole proceeds with his poem.

Arthur and Merlin are arrayed against Hengist and the "Northern Parcae." Also, Arthur and Hengist are rivals for the hand of Inogen (sic), Merlin's daughter. Eventually Arthur wins, Hengist is slain, and the "Parcae" are banished to Hecla. Arthur in the poem is a somewhat rhetorical warrior, and, as can be seen from the plot, Hole exhibits the current confusion of the times in considering Scandinavian and Celtic legends as identical. In fact, Hole's Arthur has been an excuse to exercise as much imaginative freedom as the poet wanted, and to bring into the poem fashionable poetic figures such as the bards, druids, and scalds.

Besides his antiquarian labours, Scott¹ wrote a long poem with an Arthurian theme,² not as the main one in fact, but as a story told by one character to another. It is Lyulph the Bard's Tale, told to encourage the hero, Sir Roland of Triermain, in The Bridal of Triermain (1813).

1. Before I go on to consider Scott's contribution in poetry and prose to the Arthurian legend, I would like to point out some of the references to Arthur in poetry and drama during the period under review. These references have been placed in Appendix B.
2. There is a short poem The Dying Bard (1806) which refers to Merlin. When mention is made in Marmion (1810) of Morgan, Lancelot, the Chapel Perilous and the Sangreal, Scott takes the opportunity, in two lengthy notes, to interest readers in Malory's Morte d'Arthur: "The romance of the Morte Arthur contains a sort of abridgement of the most celebrated adventures of the Round Table; and, being written in comparatively modern language, gives the general reader an excellent idea of what romances of chivalry actually were. It has also the merit of being written in pure old English; and many of the wild adventures which it contains are told with a simplicity bordering upon the sublime. Several of these are referred to in the text; and I could have illustrated them by more full extracts, but as this curious work is about to be re-published, I confine myself to the tale of the Chapel Perilous, and the quest of Sir Lancelot after the Sangreal."

Lyulph relates a tale concerning King Arthur. The king is travelling in a remote part of his kingdom, and ventures into the narrow valley of Saint John, where he comes upon a magnificent castle. He enters this castle and finds it filled with beautiful women, over whom rules Gwendolen, a fairy queen. She captivates Arthur, and he allows three months to slip away before he recollects his responsibility towards his kingdom. He sets off, leaving the queen pregnant, but promising that he will recognise the expected child and that, if it happens to be a girl, he will present her with a dowry and arrange to have her married to a goodly knight. Fifteen years elapse, and then one day Gwyneth, a young maiden, appears at court. Arthur immediately recognises her, from her likeness to her mother. He keeps his promise; and Guinevere, who has observed and understood the whole affair, remains unmoved and merely smiles - at Lancelot. Now the interested knights have to prove themselves in tourney for the hand of the maiden, and bloodshed and death are the result. Because Gwyneth has insisted upon a contest among those anxious to win her, Merlin appears, and casts an enchantment over her. Here the Arthurian interlude ends, and Sir Roland sets off to find the maiden of his dreams, in the attempt to win her from centuries of sleep.

There is no doubt that Scott was as conversant with the Arthurian legend as any of his literary contemporaries; and it is curious that he invented a variant, rather than took an established incident. It is possible that he invented because the antiquarian in him wished to leave the traditional tale untouched, though, in fact, such inventions tend to obscure it. It is interesting to note that Tennyson's interest in the

ancient legendary material of Britain was undoubtedly fostered by his early liking for Scott's poetry.¹

Curiously enough, Scott made little use of Arthurian material in his prose works, beyond referring incidentally to some of the chief figures in the cycle. There is, however, no doubt of his profound understanding of and sympathy with the knightly code and its chivalrous ideals, not least when he chooses to show derelictions from the code and neglect of the ideals.

After Scott, Reginald Heber (1783-1826) must be considered. He wrote two Arthurian poems, the Morte D'Arthur written in Spenserian stanzas (begun 1812) and the blank verse Masque of Gwendolen (1816), neither of which is finished, although he worked for many years on the first.² The two works first appeared in 1830 when his widow published a two-volume Life. In this publication the Masque of Gwendolen was printed in the text, and the Morte D'Arthur as an appendix at the end of the second volume. Both were republished in the Poetical Works (1841).

1. "About the same age (10 or 11) he fell under the spell of Scott's poetry, and composed an epic of six thousand lines in the style of Marmion which has not survived." Sir Charles Tennyson, Tennyson p 33.
2. Too many competing interests led to the poem being left incomplete. "I am strongly recommended by Heber (Richard, his half-brother) to proceed in my Dictionnaire Historique Critique, without, however, giving up my Bampton lecture scheme, or Ganore." Letter to R.J. Wilmot, Nov.12, 1812, printed in The Life of Reginald Heber (1830) Vol.I, p.389. Of his diversion from literary interests he later wrote "I am not so fortunate, certainly, as to taste that which Gibbon calls the luxury of composition; at least it is a luxury which only attends history and poetry, while the streams of polemic Divinity are nothing less than Hippocrene; and till I have rinsed my mouth with Morte Arthur, I hardly look to be my own man again." Letter to Wilmot, Feb,12, 1815, *ibid.*, Vol.I. p.426.

It is therefore quite likely that Tennyson became aware of them early, though there is no sign that he borrowed or adopted any of the earlier poet's alterations to the legend. As Heber's Morte D'Arthur is the first attempt to deal comprehensively with the Arthurian legend as given in Malory, I have included a details resume of it:

Canto I: There is merrymaking at Carduel on the Pentecost, because Arthur that morning has returned with a bride, Ganora, a simple village maid. But really she is the "heir of Carmelide, and old Ladugan's blood," and a princess in her own right. Some years before, when King Ryence had desolated her father's kingdom, she had been sent for safety to Derwentwater. There she had grown up, and there Arthur had come across her. Although she has allowed herself to be married to Arthur, she is not really in love with him. That affection she has bestowed upon a simple forester, Cadwal.

In the cathedral Arthur points out his chief knights to Ganora. Only Lancelot is absent, on some distant quest. The marriage evening is spent in feasting and merrymaking, whilst Iolo the bard relates the tale of Tristan and Yseult to the Court. As he finishes his tale, a great noise is heard outside, and a wounded hind bursts in, closely pursued by fiery hounds. A warrior damsel on horseback follows. The hind goes straight to Ganora, who shelters it with her robe. The huntress bids Ganora go to a cloister, or many men will die. Having said this, she offers the queen her spear, with which to slay the hind:

 Nay, shrink not, maiden, from the needful blow,

 Nor spare, in yonder hind, thy fiercest foe."

Ganore cannot kill what she thinks is a defenceless animal, so the fairy huntress and her hounds depart.

Canto II: Late that night, as all lie asleep, the hind changes into a woman. She is the fairy, Morgue, sister of Arthur. She moves to the marriage chamber, and as Arthur and Ganora lie asleep, she reveals part of her intention:

 I sought to lure her from her cottage nest;

 I sought to plant her on an empire's throne;

She then returns to Modred, her son. Modred, who has never known his father, feels that his fortune has been blighted because of the mysterious shame connected with his birth. He presses his mother to reveal all. She in turn leads him to an neglected tomb, and tells him how Arthur, in a rage, slew her paramour, Sir Paladore, because of "unpermitted love" of which he, Modred, is the result. On her paramour's death Morgue relates how she tried to kill herself, but supernatural forces intervened, and she was taken into fairyland.

Morgue now sends her son out on a quest for a diamond ring, which has the virtue of making its bearer invisible. The ring had been on loan to Urgan, a Scottish king. Modred sets off, and Morgue returns to the castle and the guise of a hind.

On the following day tournaments are held. Suddenly there appears a strange woman, and the hind, which has been playing beside Ganora, seeks to hide. The mysterious woman has come for help, for she has been dispossessed of her kingdom by a Scottish chief, who has the power to move unseen. He who would go on this quest must first pull a sword from a scabbard which she carries. Arthur tries unsuccessfully to free the sword, also Carados, Kay, Gahriet and Gawain. News of this task reaches Balin, a knight who has been imprisoned because of his bad temper, and he is allowed to make an attempt. He is successful, and goes off with the mysterious lady to attempt the quest.

Canto III: Six weeks elapse, and the court goes hunting:

To drink in Cattraeth's woods the cooler breeze,

And rouse the dun deer from Terwathlin's side.

But Ganora remains in the palace, having little liking for the cruelties of the hunt. She looks out from her turret, until the huntsmen disappear.

Then she wanders troubled from room to room, until she enters a wonderful hall, in the midst of which is an altar:

Before whose beam a sinful heart might quail,

And sinful eye to bear its beauty fail.

It was, to ween, that gracious implement

Of heavenly love, the three-times hallowed Grayle

To Britain's Realm awhile in mercy lent,

Till sin defil'd the land, and lust incontinent."

Around the walls Ganora sees the deeds of all the knights:

David, Judas Maccabeus, Constantine, Arthur... and there she catches sight of her "forester." She finds a name above the portrait - Lancelot. Then she goes off and asks her maidens to tell her more of this Lancelot. A maid tells her of how Lancelot, son of Ban, was brought up by the fairy Lady of the Lake..... (here Heber's poem stops).

It will be seen from this resume that Heber was the first modern poet to make much use of Malory, and other Arthurian sources, and to plan and in part execute a long Arthurian poem which does not merely relate an established incident, or invent a variant. A work on this scale, and dealing as it does with much refractory material, must have strongly developed characterisation running through it if it is not to break up into a series of separate tales. This narrative basis is Heber's intention, and he cleverly weaves together the strands of what looks like a very complex plot, while infusing a nineteenth-century outlook on morality into the medieval legends. Interesting, too, are his departures from Malory, particularly in his delineation of Ganora and Arthur, and the reasons for

their estrangement. Ganora has loved Lancelot long before she has met Arthur, but she has lost touch with him, and owing to the manipulations of Morgue she has met and been married to Arthur in the meantime. Thus Arthur and herself are the victims of supernatural powers, and there is no sinful connivance as in Malory. Moreover Arthur is not the king who has committed incest with his sister, and who carries this guilt with him. He is the man of indeterminate age and high moral intention, the prototype of Tennyson's spiritual king.

As the work is incomplete, it is perhaps unfair to judge it by the same criteria as would apply to a work completed. Nevertheless, it is not unfair to say that the reader can hardly feel full sympathy with characters who are not free agents but the puppets of fair powers. Presumably Merlin was to be brought into the poem later on, to counteract the evil forces represented by Morgue. Another weakness is the confusing use of allusions from several distinctly separate sources and fields of reference: classical, Norse, Welsh, Irish and Biblical.¹

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1. This is a common fault of the time. Landor has the best criticism: "I desire to find Laodamia in the silent and gloomy mansion of her beloved Protesilaus; not elbowed by the godly butchers in Tottenham-Court-Road, nor smelling devoutly of ratafia among the sugar-bakers' wives at Blackfriars. Mythologies should be kept distinct: the fire place of one should never be subject to the smoke of another." W.S. Landor, Imaginary Conversations: Southey and Porson p29 Vol I (1868 ed).

The Masque of Gwendolen is delightful,¹ and is the first English poem to relate the incident of Merlin and Nimue from Malory's Book IV Chapter I. It also cleverly weaves in the story, not in Malory, of Gawain and the hideous lady, which was probably obtained from The Marriage of Sir Gawaine in Percy's Reliques.

A poem of this time that may have contributed to Tennyson's understanding of Arthurian legend, and which might have influenced both his style and his characterisation in Samor, Lord of the Bright City (1818)

1. I. Gwendolen will not allow Merlin to love her. She says she would rather be "a thing of loathing and of natural horror" than let him, unholy as he is, have anything to do with her. Therefore Merlin transforms her into a hag. II. In this condition Titania's fairies find her, but Titania tells them that Merlin himself has just died:

"By female wiles he fell.
She of the lake, his elfin paramour,
Jealous of his late wanderings, - in a tomb,
(First having won by sugar'd blandishment
From his dark soul the unutterable name
Which all things fear in hell, in earth and heaven,)
Inclos'd the struggling wizard. Nine long nights
Within the rock the fairies heard him moan,
The tenth was silence!"

The spell on Gwendolen must continue, however, until certain things are fulfilled. III: At court all await Gawain, who has been sent to find what women chiefly crave, and has returned with the answer, power. Gwendolen, loathsome as she is, appears and demands recompense for the answer she has given Gawain (She had received the answer herself from Merlin). IV: They are married, for that is the price she demands for the knowledge. He is about to forsake her when she claims at least a kiss from him. He obliges very reluctantly, and she is transformed back to a beautiful woman again.

by Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868). It consists of twelve books, and is written in blank verse.¹ The hero of the poem is a British chief Samor, more commonly known in the chronicles as Edol or Eldol, who was instrumental in rallying the Britons against the Saxons in the time of Vortigern. Merlin plays a prominent part in encouraging the hero of the poem (Book VIII 230-509) and prophecies success for the Britons. Moreover, Milman ennobles Merlin, and makes him a prophet of God. He sees into the future and foresees Arthur's victories, and also those of Alfred the Great, William the Conqueror, and others. The young boy Arthur appears in Book X 195 as an impetuous princeling who precipitates the final battle which ends in British victory.

The poem has some very fine passages, particularly when it is considered that it was begun while Milman was still a schoolboy, and it contains some telling images and much spirited description of the kind Tennyson would be likely to notice. Moreover, though much of the blank verse is imitative of Milton, occasionally the poet breaks away into a vigorous strain of his own which quite often suggests

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1. "This, commenced as an Eton boy, was almost finished while he was an undergraduate at Oxford, though it was not published until the success of Fazio had encouraged him to hazard another appearance before the public. Though probably known to few - for, lost in the infinitely accumulating crowd of books, it has shared the fate of many and no doubt more deserving performances - Samor is of some interest as one of the earliest works of its author, and as showing the varied nature of the studies with which his school days were occupied." p.37 Henry Hart Milman, A Biographical Sketch by A. Milman (1900).

Tennyson's method of narration and description in the Idylls.¹

A year after Heber began his Morte D'Arthur appeared a poem of a very different kind by a man as well versed in legend as Heber himself. It was the Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work (1813) by William and Robert Whistlecraft, alias John Hookham Frere (1769-1846).² This curious work was written to introduce a new style and rhyme scheme into English literature.³ It was left incomplete because people failed to see its significance, or found a false significance in it.⁴

1. There is not enough proof that Milman's poem was a source of Tennyson's.
2. "The first part of "The Monks and the Giants" was published by Mr. J. Murray in 1817, as the 'Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work, by William and Robert Whistlecraft, of Stowmarket, in Suffolk, harness and collar-makers, intended to comprise the most interesting particulars relating to King Arthur and his Round Table.' A second part was subsequently sent to Mr. Murray, who published both together in 1818, with the title of 'The Monks and the Giants'". The Works of John Hookham Frere in Verse and Prose Vol. I p 163 (London 1874).
3. "I wished to give an example of a kind of burlesque of which I do not think that any good specimen previously existed in our language... and my first intention in "The Monks and the Giants" was merely to give a specimen of the burlesque treatment of lofty and serious subjects by a thoroughly common, but not necessarily low-minded man - a Suffolk harness-maker." (ibid) I, 164.
4. "Most people who read it at the time it was published, would not take the work in any merely humorous sense; they would imagine it was some political satire, and went on hunting for a political meaning; so I thought it was no use offering my jokes to people who would not understand them." (ibid.) I, 166.

It is curious that at a time when the whole attitude to the legend had become so serious Frere could write in this way. But he was a friend of the genial Ellis, and his own classical and humorous bent, best shown in his translations of Aristophanes, did not make him entirely sympathetic to the Arthurian legend. A work of this mocking kind would hardly stimulate much interest in the legend; but it introduced Byron to the stanza and the comic style he adopted for Beppo, Don Juan, and The Vision of Judgement.

T.L. Peacock's Misfortunes of Elphin (1829) is in prose but it exploits the absurd potentialities of romance in much the same way as Frere's Specimen. The chief action in the novel is Guinevere's abduction to the castle of King Melvas, where the bard Taliesin finds her. Taliesin acts as a mediator so that Guinevere eventually is restored to her husband. This is the traditional story, but Peacock satirises Arthur's phlegmatic attitude to his wife's abduction. Later in the novel Guinevere slaps a courtier for some triviality, and is shown as a common shrew. Thus Peacock has modernised the legend, by making the behaviour of the characters anything but ideal, and successfully satirised the writers who uncritically utilised legends during his own day. His work is not entirely iconoclastic, however. At the beginning of each chapter he places selected extracts from the Welsh triads,

which were practically unknown up to that time.¹

Seemingly the next person to allude to the legend is Wordsworth, in his The Egyptian Maid, or The Romance of the Water Lily (1828, published 1835). It is curious to find Wordsworth referring to the legend at all. Like Scott, he devises a new story and makes no attempt to follow the traditional material.² He also struck out for it, more or less accidentally, a new stanza.³

1. Peacock was also responsible for The Round Table, or King Arthur's Feast (1819), a comic poem in which Arthur complains to Merlin "When shall the fates re-establish my reign/ And spread my round table in Britain again?" Merlin obliges by "spreading" the Table and summoning from Hades all the kings of Britain from Arthur's time till George III. Another work, Sir Proteus (1814), attacks in ballad measure the new taste for ballads and romance, satirising Southey, Coleridge, Byron, Scott and Wordsworth. Sir Hornbrook, or Childe Launcelot's Expedition, (A grammatico-allegorical Ballad) (1818), Arthurian only in title, cleverly makes words battle, to explain grammar for children. In this context mention should be made of two works of Thomas Hood (1759-1845), A Lament for the Decline of Chivalry, published in Bijou (1828), and There's No Romance in That, published in Hood's Own, or Laughter from Year to Year (1839). The first poem laments the decline in chivalry, but offers comic parallels between antiquity and Hood's own day; the second contrasts the mercantile stolidity of early Victorian life with the life in days of yore.
2. "For the names and persons in the following poem, see the 'History of the Renowned Prince Arthur and his knights of the Round Table;' for the rest the Author is answerable." Prefatory Note to The Egyptian Maid.
3. "The form of the stanza is new, and nothing but a repetition of the first five lines as they were thrown off, and it is not perhaps well-suited to narrative, and certainly would not have been trusted to had I thought at the beginning that the poem would have gone to such a length." Prefatory Note to The Egyptian Maid.

The story is as follows:- Merlin paces the Cornish sands, and sees a ship passing "that seemed to hang in air." He is jealous of its splendour, and by magic interferes with its passage. As a result the ship, "The Egyptian Maid," sinks, and the body of a maiden is driven ashore. Merlin flees to a cave when he sees the death he has caused. But Nina, the Lady of the Lake, appears, and demands that he restore the girl to life. She herself fetches the body from the shore to the cave, and Merlin summons two swans, who bear the body to Caerleon. On their arrival at the city Arthur is vexed because the maid's father, who has recently been converted to Christianity, may revert to paganism when he hears that his daughter has met with such a fate. Arthur would have her buried with proper ceremony, but Merlin wishes that the knights should try first to revive her. Each in turn has to go up and clasp her hand. Agravaine, Kay, Dinas, Percival, Gawaine, Tristram, and Lancelot all fail. Galahad approaches, and is successful. He is to marry the Egyptian maid. The poem ends with eight shorter stanzas, the moral of the story being:

Who shrinks not from alliance
Of evil with good Powers,
To God proclaims defiance,
And mocks whom he adores.

Clearly Wordsworth little understood the story of the Grail.

There are only three other considerable works (apart from Tennyson's own) which use the Arthurian legend before Tennyson started work on the first of his Idylls of the King. These are the King Arthur (1848) of Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), James Russell Lowell's Sir Launfal (1848), and Matthew Arnold's Tristram and Iseult (1852).

Lytton's King Arthur reads more like a novel than a poem.

The style is very uneven, and the treatment of Arthur something of a departure from Arthurian tradition, though Lytton claims his version embodies medieval manners.¹ Arthur has a series of adventures, in which he visits the court of Ludovick the Vandal King, and from there proceeds to the Happy Valley, which is a forgotten region where the Etruscan civilisation lingers on. Eventually, after a trip to the Polar regions,² he arrives back in Britain again, and the poem concludes with a peace between Briton and Saxon. Though Lytton's intention was serious, his unconventional and unskillful treatment of the Arthurian did not capture the public imagination.

The Vision of Sir Launfal concerns a dream of Sir Launfal (the name comes from Marie de France's Lanval) who is about to set off on the Grail quest. He dreams he maltreats a beggar, proudly offering gold instead of true charity, and accordingly he is not granted a vision of the Grail and returns years later a poor and broken man to find his castle occupied by another nobleman. At the gate he is accosted by

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1. "For the manners preserved through this poem, I naturally reject those which the rigid Antiquary would appropriate to the date of that Historical Arthur, of whom we know so little, and take those of the age in which the Arthur of Romance, whom we know so well, revived into fairer life at the breath of Minstrel and Fabliast." p.5 of Introduction to King Arthur, from The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1853).
 2. Not an invention of Lytton's, but presumably based on the fantastic claims made for Arthur in Hakluyt's The Second Part of the Principall Navigations (1589) p245, or The Chronicle of Iohn Hardyng (1543).

the same loathly beggar as before, but this time he shares a crust with him, all that he possesses. Immediately the beggar is transformed into Christ, and Launfal awakes to find it is all a dream. But he realises that the vision of the Grail is really in his own castle and everywhere, if he only cleanse himself of sin.

Tristram and Iseult is a borrowing of the legend to express a dichotomy in Arnold's character, really symbolical of his relationship to the Swiss Marguerite and to his wife. The source of the poem is not Malory, but a story told in a French article on romance.¹ Neither Tristram nor the two Iseults are convincingly portrayed, and Arnold's profoundest expression is found as a kind of coda to the poem. He was well aware of the scarcely-veiled pessimism he was expressing, and ended with the tale of Merlin's perpetual imprisonment by Vivien, which he claims lightens the effect of the poem upon his readers, but which in fact expresses a resolution of the original dilemma as an allegory

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1. Arnold writes to Hill, Nov 5, 1852: "I am still too near my own poems to decide impartially on the justice of the particular exceptions you take to them; with regard to the conclusion of "Tristram and Iseult," the story of Merlin, of which I am particularly fond, was brought in on purpose to relieve the poem, which would else, I thought, have ended too sadly; but perhaps the new element introduced is too much. I read the story of Tristram and Iseult some years ago at Thun in an article in a French review on the romance literature; I had never met with it before, and it fastened upon me; when I got back to England I looked at the "Morte d'Arthur" and took what I could, but the poem was already in the main formed, and I could not well disturb it. If I had read the story first in the "Morte d'Arthur" I should have managed it differently. I am by no means satisfied with Tristram in the second part myself." From an uncollected letter first published in The Times Literary Supplement, March 1913.

within an allegory. Tennyson no doubt read the poem, and it may have suggested to him the possibility of treating Arthurian stories with a contemporary application and lesson.

Thus because of a lack of interest in things medieval during the classically-biased eighteenth century little was known of the Arthurian Legend, apart from the interest of a few enlightened critics and writers. But towards the turn of the century a serious interest in the legend gradually developed, because of the efforts of antiquaries, editors, and historians, until many poets and writers reverted to the theme. By the time of Tennyson's childhood the legend was comparatively well known, especially in Malory's comprehensive version, the Morte d'Arthur, which was published in no less than three separate editions during 1816-1817 (two of them cheap popular reprints of the Stansby edition).

While the legend had become much better known, no poet or writer had really done justice to the theme yet. Every person who had approached it had been content to use the names of the chief figures in the cycle because of their historico-legendary exploits, or, like Reginald Heber, they attempted to be too ambitious by undertaking the whole corpus, in itself often conflicting and inconsistently worked out, with the result that they failed to complete the story or were led to make fantastic variants quite out of keeping with the original theme. Yet Heber's work is noteworthy because he attempted to use the legend as a means of conveying moral lessons to his own times,

and because of his suggestion of Arthur as a perfect king who embodied ideal behaviour.

Thus by the time Tennyson first took up the theme in 1830 and the following few years, no writer had derived a significant work from the legend, and when he returned to it again in 1856, he found the legend still comparatively unhackneyed, though interest in it had increased considerably in the meantime, owing to improved literary and historical research, and owing to the ever-increasing success of his own original Arthurian poems, particularly The Lady of Shalott and the Morte d'Arthur.

CHAPTER II

Tennyson's Early Arthurian Poetry

As I have noted in the first chapter, Tennyson was interested from his earliest years in ballads and romance.¹ As a child he had played knight-games with his brothers in the fields around Somersby rectory.² The publication in which he first appeared, Poems by Two Brothers (1827), contains no reference to the Arthurian legend, but there are many allusions to classical authors, and a considerable interest is shown in legendary Britain.³

His next publication, the Cambridge prize-poem Timbuctoo (1829) is interesting in that it reveals an outlook on legend as an expression of man's spirit,⁴ and also the idea of the rise and decline of legendary empires, deprived of their romance by contact with modern

1. See Chapter I, p 18 footnote 1.

2. It is recorded in Memoir II, 342 that when Tennyson visited his brother Frederick in the Channel Islands in the summer of 1837, they reminisced over the golden apples in the Somersby rectory garden, and of the tilts and tourneys they had in the fields. See also Memoir I, 4 and Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning p.5. by Anne Ritchie (1892).

3. See, for example, The Old Sword, Midnight, The Old Chieftain, all later identified as being from the pen of Alfred. In the poem King Charles's Vision he uses a ballad metre in spirited fashion.

4. "And much I mused on legends quaint and old
Which whilome won the hearts of all on Earth
Towards their brightness, ev'n as flame draws air;
But had their being in the heart of Men
As air is the life of flame."

Timbuctoo 16-20

civilisations,¹ a theme that was to haunt Tennyson and find expression later in the Idylls of the King.

The 1830 volume contains nothing Arthurian. The 1832 volume (dated 1833) however, contains the first version of The Lady of Shalott and The Palace of Art, which refers to Arthur and Uther, and in 1842, along with the revised versions of these poems are published Sir Galahad, Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, A Fragment, and the Morte d'Arthur.²

Sir Galahad and Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere are descriptive sketches, and Tennyson was content to publish the latter poem incomplete. The poems are pointers to an early interest in the Grail theme, and to the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, The Morte d'Arthur is something more considerable, for in it there is a whole ethic of the world, an outlook on life that was to set its stamp upon all the Idylls of the King, the failure of the man of intellect and ideals, the spiritual man who has dream-designs for the world,

1. The angel states at the end of the poem that Timbuctoo, like Eldorado, has lost its splendour, modern discovery having reduced the glory of its legends to nothing:-

..... the time is well nigh come
 When I must render up this glorious home
 To keen Discovery: soon yon brilliant towers
 Shall darken with the waving of her wand;
 Darken, and shrink and shiver into huts,
 Black specks amidst a waste of dreary sand,
 Low-built, mud-wall'd, Barbarian settlement,
 How chang'd from this fair City.

2. "By the end of the year (1833) he had already completed or sketched out, The Two Voices (originally called Thoughts of a Suicide), Ulysses, St. Simeon Stylites, St. Agnes, Lancelot and Guinevere (sic), Sir Galahad and The Beggar Maid. He had also composed some of the most famous sections of In Memoriam, and had probably begun the first draft of the Morte d'Arthur." Sir Charles Tennyson, Tennyson (1949) pl46.

when he is confronted with the task of governing ordinary mortals who are more concerned in expressing their emotions than with obedience to an ideal code of behaviour. Returning first to The Lady of Shalott, the idea for the title of the poem and for some of the details, comes from an Italian story, "La Damigiella di Scalot," a version of the Elaine story which Tennyson could have read in various editions.¹ It has also been asserted that apart from this

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1. The Italian origin of the tale was noted first by Palgrave p257 The Lyric Poems of Tennyson (1899). In an article in MLN XVIII (Dec 1902) 473-478, L.S. Potwin suggested that the particular Italian story upon which Tennyson drew for his portrait of the Lady was Novella lxxxi in Cento Novelle Antiche (Milan 1804). He showed that this was particularly true of the details in the first version of The Lady of Shalott (1833), and concluded: "The main bond of connection between Novella and poem is that Camelot is made the end of the funeral voyage, and is on the sea-shore. Until, then, some other romance is forthcoming we must say that Tennyson took what he pleased from Malory, and what he pleased from Novella lxxxi." In an article replying to this identification MLN XVIII (Dec 1903) 227-8, D.L. Chambers noted (i) The Italian story is listed in J.C. Dunlop's History of Fiction (1814), Ch VII, and a version of it is given in Thomas Roscoe's translations entitled Italian Novelists (1825), (ii) That the comparatively rare Cento Novelle Antiche (Milan 1804) was not therefore necessarily the source of Tennyson's story, and in fact it was more likely that he had read it in an earlier but more easily obtainable Cento Novelle Antiche, of which there were several editions from the fifteenth century on, and (iii) He notes a conspicuous similarity, unnoticed by Potwin, between the Italian story and Tennyson's account, as far as the details of the reaction of the knights and ladies to the lady's arrival in Camelot are concerned.

In another version of Elaine, that given in Ellis's Specimens (1805) in the abstract of 'Morte Arthure', her descent to Camelot is in a boat "which appeared to be floating down the stream without any guidance." I, 342.

Tennyson may have been introduced to 'La Damigiella di Scalot' by Arthur Hallam, always a keen exponent of Italian literature. Hallam had visited Italy in 1827.

Italian version and the story in Malory, the poem owes something to Spenser,¹ to Shelley,² and to Keats,³. But even if all that comes from the Italian is the name Shalott (Scalot) - derived ultimately from the French Astolat - and the proximity of this mysterious Shalott to the sea, this is just the kind of circumstance, a romantic name and a strange locality, to inspire a poet.

1. D.L. Chambers in MLN XVIII (Dec 1903), ascribes the mirror origin to Spenser FQ III,ii,17ff, the mirror Merlin makes for King Ryence, and in which Britomart sees and falls in love with Artegall. She complains that she must "feed on shadowes" because of the power of the mirror. Also the description of Prince Arthur, FQ I.vii.29-34 tallies in several respects with the description of Lancelot in Part III of The Lady of Shalott. Chambers ascribes the details of the river and the web to Malory.

2. In The "High-Born Maiden" Symbol in Tennyson, PMLA LXIII (1948) Lionel Stevenson points out a similarity between Shelley's daemonic lady in The Witch of Atlas (1820, published 1824) and Tennyson's lady. The witch during her earlier years was confined to a cave on Mount Atlas, where one of her occupations was weaving the mists: "And with the threads a subtle veil she wove/A Shadow for the splendour of her love." (151-2).

Unlike the Lady of Shalott she eventually had freedom to wander over the world, although by her very nature she was barred from entering into the activities and experiences of ordinary beings, and as a result suffered from a peculiar loneliness. One cannot identify the witch too closely with the inmate of Shalott however, for in some ways she is her direct opposite: ... her beauty made

The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade:

No thought of living spirit could abide,
Which to her looks had ever been betrayed.

(137-141)

3. In Keats and the Victorians (Yale 1944) G.H. Ford traces Keats' influence on Victorian poetry and aesthetic theory. Pages 25-27 discuss The Lady of Shalott, and Ford considers that the silver bugle of Lancelot may have come from Endymion I, 273. Keats' poem also mentions a shallop (I,423) and galleys with silken sails (IV,249) so Ford thinks this gave Tennyson his image of "the shallop flitteth silken-sail'd." Undoubtedly Tennyson relighted in Keatsian colouring, but much of it is to be found in a late medieval poem referring incidentally to the chief figures in the Arthurian cycle., Partenopex de Blois translated by W.S. Rose (1807). Here the line "There gilded shallops rode with silken sail" occurs (pl40), and seems the likeliest source of Tennyson's image.

The Lady of Shalott appeared in the 1832 volume and subsequently, much revised, in the 1842 volume.¹ The changes after that date are very slight. The ballad form, with its constant alliteration, its repetitions, and with the regular alternating refrain, readily creates the effect of the clicking shuttles as the mysterious lady plies her loom. Goethe's Gretchen am Spinnrade, a song from Faust (1808),² obtains the effect of spinning in the same way, and although written in a simpler stanzaic and metrical form, it may have influenced Tennyson, particularly as it concerns the devastating effect of awakening love upon a woman. If Tennyson did know of it before he composed The Lady of Shalott, it must have been in the form of a translation,³ for his intensive study of German began only in 1833.⁴

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1. He had already written or was writing several other poems on the same or very similar themes: Mariana (1830); Oriana (1830); Mariana in the South (1831); The Miller's Daughter (1833); Oenone (1833). There is no evidence in Tennyson's own life that this preoccupation with isolated, forlorn or rejected women is written from direct experience, and it is more probable that often it is a convenient figure to express his own poetic musings and feelings of a lack of identity with the outside world.
 2. Faust Part I (1808) 3018 ff.
 3. Tennyson might have heard Schubert's setting of Goethe's poem (1814), with its brilliant piano accompaniment which simulates the sound and movements of the loom.
One stanza of the poem is translated by George Soane to accompany a plate (Plate XVI) illustrating Margareta at the Spinning Wheel in Extracts from Goethe's Tragedy of Fautus Explanatory of the Plates by Retsch (1820).
Most of Faust Part I, including a fair rendition of the spinning song, was translated by Lord Francis Leveson Gower in Faust (1823).
 4. Tennyson's intensive study of German dates from 1833, when a study-plan indicates he was learning the language five days a week (Memoir I. 124). This may have been under the influence of his Cambridge friend Richard Moncton Milnes, who was addicted to Goethe.
Memoir II, 504 records of Tennyson's later years: "The Prologue and songs in Faust he often quoted with lavish praise."

As far as Arthurian details are concerned, the 1842 version shows no development on the 1832 version.

I would like to consider certain details in the poem, apart from the borrowings from the Italian story, Malory, Spenser, Shelley, and Keats, which shows that Tennyson's readings in the supernatural at this time may have influenced him. The influence of two books particularly may be detected, The Fairy Mythology¹ by Thomas Keightley, and Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland² by Thomas Crofton Croker.

Crofton Croker suggests that harvest time and full moon are the likeliest times for fairy activity, in this observation on the elves:-

During the summer nights, when the moon shines, and particularly in harvest time, the elves come out of their secret dwellings and assemble for the dance in certain favourite spots, which are hidden and secluded spaces, such as mountain valleys - meadows near streams and brooks - churchyards where men seldom come.³

This may have given Tennyson the idea of harvest time for the reapers to hear the Lady of Shalott when she was singing, and of the remoteness of the island on which she was confined.

Keightley suggests the peculiar fragility of fairy life:-

There are only a very few old persons now who can tell anything more about them than of the sweet singing that may occasionally on summer nights be heard out of their hills.... but no one must be so cruel as, by the slightest word, to destroy their hopes of salvation, for then the spritely music will be turned into weeping and lamentation.⁴

1. 1828

2. 1828. Tennyson first read the two books about the time they were published, and Memoir I 129-130 records his rereading them.

3. Fairy Legends and Traditions Vol III p2

4. The Fairy Mythology pl36

This may have suggested to Tennyson the spell put on the Lady of Shalott, and the ease with which it may be broken.

I note what might be another borrowing from Crofton Croker which, though minor, shows the care with which Tennyson worked, particularly when he was revising certain poems from the 1832 volume with the intention of republishing them. Now the only evidence for the lady's residence on the island, as far as the people in the outside world are concerned, is her singing late at night or in the very early morning. At such times the reaper "piling sheaves in uplands airy" has heard her. The relevant part of the stanza is:-

And by the moon the reaper weary
Piling sheaves in uplands airy
Listening, whispers, 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott.

At first sight the word 'airy' (a variant of 'eery') seems but a convenience of rhyme, like some of the other rhymes in the poem. In the 1832 version of the poem there were no uplands, and then the reaper was "Piling the sheaves in furrows airy," presumably to get the corn or barley dry as quickly as possible. But a footnote in Crofton Croker's Fairy Legends which provides an unusual meaning to the word 'airy', makes the use of the word in the stanza relevant, and indicates, I think, the care which Tennyson took over his revisions. The footnote says:-

A lonesome place in Scotland and Ireland, is commonly said to be 'an airy place' from airidhe, which in Irish signifies spectres, visions.¹
Tennyson must have observed this footnote in rereading the book, and seeing an opportunity for revision he made his rhyme unforced and his uplands appropriately haunted.

1. Fairy Legends II, footnote to pl32.

One way in which Tennyson emphasizes the steadily approaching death of the Lady of Shalott once she has occasioned the spell is to show how her voice fades as she sings her last song:-

Chanted loudly, chanted lowly
Till her blood was frozen slowly.

Now this description may be borrowed from Crofton Croker's account of the Banshee or Kyhirraeth, a supernatural warning of approaching death:-

That is a doleful, disagreeable sound, heard before the deaths of many, and most apt to be heard before foul weather. The voice resembles the groaning of sick persons who are to die, heard at first at a distance, then comes nearer, and the last near at hand; so that it is a threefold warning of death, the king of terrors. It begins strong, and louder than a sick man can make; the second cry is lower, but not less doleful, but rather more so; the third yet lower, and soft like the groaning of a sick person almost spent and dying.¹

This passage might have suggested to Tennyson the lady's singing as she drifts down river, and the way in which she sings. It may also have suggested the dramatic change in the weather once the spell is invoked, though this is a device frequently used in fairy tales and in literature based upon the supernatural.² Certainly the idea of the Banshee or Kyhirraeth had a peculiar fascination for Tennyson.³

1. Fairy Legends and Traditions III, 290. Parallels between this passage and Elaine's death in Lancelot and Elaine are considered in the chapter on the Idyll.
2. See, for example, Arabian, Celtic and German Marchen, and The Tempest.
3. In William Allingham, A Diary (1907) ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford, Allingham records, 29 Oct 1886: "I tell him (Tennyson) I have written a ballad on the 'Banshee.' T: 'I intend to write one. I have always been much struck by the 'Banshee.'" This shows the curious fascination the idea always had for the poet.

But while it is no doubt useful to find that such a literary poet as Tennyson had probably, consciously or unwittingly, used images and ideas from various sources along with other images and ideas of his own, one can only note with awe how he has woven them into a profound and beautiful poem, and that no matter how many new sources are discovered, the fact remains that in the creative imagination of a poetic genius all of these images and sources become his own, and convey something entirely new.

The sources of Sir Galahad¹ are to be found in Books XIII - XVII of Malory, which concern the quest of the Grail, but Tennyson draws chiefly from XIII and XVII, with occasional touches from the adventures of Lancelot, Percival and Bors in the intervening books. The account of Galahad's prowess in the tournament is Tennyson's own, though a hint of:

Perfumes and flowers fall in showers
That lightly rain from ladies' hands

is to be found in Malory's detail:

"... and the Quene was in a toure with alle her ladyes for to behold that turnement. Thenne sir Galahalt dressid hym in myddes

1. In PQ XXVIII (April 1949) M.T. Donohue discusses what is possibly the original version of Sir Galahad, obtained from the Heath manuscript (a commonplace book kept by Tennyson's Cambridge friend John Moore Heath, which contains copies of many of Tennyson's poems 1833-1835), particularly the fifth stanza (which was the only one to undergo any revision) and also what was originally the sixth, later excised and never published with the poem. There is nothing in these changes which is revealing of sources.

of the medowe, and began to breke speres merueyllously that all men had wonder of hym..."¹

When Galahad embarks upon the Grail quest, Tennyson ignores the important incident of the Castle of Maidens. His concern is not allegorical, but chiefly to evoke an atmosphere of mystic devotion and a feeling of religious destiny and fulfilment.

In stanza III:

Then by some secret shrine I ride;
I hear a voice, but none are there;
The stalls are void, the doors are wide,
The tapers burning fair.
Fair gleams the snowy altar-cloth,
The silver vessels sparkle clean,
The shrill bell rings, the censer swings,
And solemn chaunts resound between."

it seems to be taken partly from Malory's description:

Thenne syr Galahad came vnto a montayne where he fond
and old chappel, and fond there no body for all alle was
desolate, and there he kneled to fore the aulter, and
besought god of holsome counceil. Soo as he prayd, he herd
a voys that sayd, Goo thow now though aduentrous knyghte to
the Castell of maydens, and there doo thow awet thy wycked
custommes.²

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1. Book XIII Chapter VI. All quotations from Malory are made from Southey's edition, The Byrth, Lyf and Actes of Kyng Arthur (1817). While, as has been noted, Tennyson was acquainted with the pocket edition put out by Walker and Edwards the previous year, he used Southey's edition to obtain the real flavour of antiquity and, as will be seen when the Idylls are discussed, knew the comprehensive notes and background material to the legends in Southey's version intimately. In fact he might have been using Southey's edition from 1833 on, if the Malory mentioned in Memoir I, 130-131 was Southey's version.
 2. Book XIII Chapter XIV

When, in the next stanza, Galahad's boat journey is described, the details seem to have been taken from Lancelot's journey alone in the bark:

... and soo by aduventure he came by a stronde, & fonde
a shyp the which was withoute sayle or ore,¹

though the mountain indicated in his earlier adventure at the desolate chapel might also have been used:

Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board: no helmsman steers:
I float till all is dark.

He constantly pursues the glimmering vision which leads him to the ideal. His own religious aspiration:

I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven
That often meet me here

is an expression of:

.... and Galahad felle in his prayer longe tyme to
oure lord that at what tyme he asked that he shold
passe out of this world, soo moche he prayd tyle a voyce
sayd to hym Galahad thou shalt haue thy request.²

Finally, the idea given in Malory of Galahad's death:

And there with he kneled doune to fore the table, and
made his prayers, and thenne sodenly his soule departed
to Jhesu Crist and a grete multitude of Angels bare
his soule vp to heuen, that the two felawes myghte
wel behold hit. Also the two felawes sawe come from
heuen an hand, but they sawe not the body. And thenne
hit cam ryght to the vessel, and took it and the spere,
and soo bare hit vp to heuen. Sythen was there neuer man
soo hardy to saye that he had sene the Sancgreal.³

1. Book XVII Chapter XIII
2. Book XVII Chapter XXI
3. Book XVII Chapter XXII

becomes transformed in Tennyson to:

And stricken by an angel's hand,
This mortal armour that I wear,
This weight and size, this heart and eyes
Are touch'd are turn'd to finest air.¹

These few examples show how Tennyson takes a hint, or adapts a detail to suit the story. He was already drawing from the legend quite freely.

The other important details that Tennyson changes are to make Galahad's armour white, associated with purity, rather than Malory's red armour, associated presumably with the colour of the passion of Our Lord, or the light of the Grail.

The episode of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere² is an invention of Tennyson's own, which he later made use of in three of the Idylls. It might have been suggested by the early details in Malory of Guinevere's journey to London to marry Arthur, though in Malory it is Merlin who accompanies Guinevere to London:

.... and so they rode fresshly with grete royalte,
what by water and what by land, tyl they came byghe vnto
london.³

1. The description in this stanza of the insubstantiality of the body reminds one of Tennyson's description of his mystical experiences, especially in the way he makes Arthur express the presence of spiritual realities in the conclusion to The Holy Grail.
2. In Memoir I p59 Hallam prints an unpublished stanza of a different form of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere which had been circulated among Tennyson's Cambridge contemporaries before or after he left university:-

Life of the Life within my blood,
Light of the Light within my eyes,
The May begins to breathe and bud,
And softly blow the balmy skies;
Bathe with me in the fiery flood,
And mingle kisses, tears, and sighs,
Life of the Life within my blood,
Light of the Light within my eyes.

3. Book III Chapter I.

Tennyson's description of Guinevere:

She seem'd a part of joyous Spring:
A gown of grass-green silk she wore,
Buckled with golden clasps before;
A light-green tuft of plumes she bore
Closed in a golden ring.

Seems to be drawn from a much later section of Malory, just before
the denouement:

Soo it befelle in the moneth of May, quene Gueneuer
called vnto her knyghtes of the table round, and she gaf
them warnynge that erly vpon the morowe she wold ryde
on mayeng in to woodes & feldes besyde Westmynstre, & I
warne you that there be none of yow but that he be wel
horsed, and that ye alle be clothed in grene outhur in
sylke outhur in clothe....¹

In considering the Morte d'Arthur, it would seem Tennyson has
drawn almost entirely from Malory's account, Book XVI Chapters IV
and V. The atmosphere of cold, desolation and ruin, and the symbolism
seem to be inventions of Tennyson's own. I have juxtaposed Malory's
account with the poem, taking the narrative order from the poem in
every case:

Therefore sayd Arthur vnto ayr
Bedwere, take thou Excalibur my
good swerde and goo with it to
yonder water syde...

Thou therefore take my brand
Excalibur

and in the midst of the lake
Arthur was ware of an arm
clothed in white samite...
(Book I Ch XXIII)

Which was my pride, for you
rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon,
an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the
lake
Clothed in white samite, mystic,
wonderful,
Holding the sword....
and how I row'd across
And took it....

Well, said the damsel, go ye
into yonder barge and row
yourself to the sword, and
take it and the scabbard
with you....
(Book I Ch XXIII)

... and when thou comest there,
I charge the throwe my swerde
in that water and come
ageyn and telle me what
thou there seest....

My lord said Bedwere your
commaundement shal be doon
and lyghtly brynge you
worde ageyn...

So Syr Bedwere departed, and
by the waye he behelde that
noble swerde that the pomel
and the hafte was al of
precious stones.....

And thenne syr Bedwere hydde
excalibur vnder a tree...

And so as sone as he myght he
came ageyn vnto the kyng, and
sayd he had ben at the water
and had throwen the swerde
in to the water

What sawe thou there sayd
the kyng, syr he sayd I sawe
no thyng but waves and
wyndes.

That is vntrewly sayd of
the sayd the kynge.
Therefore go thou lyghtly
ageyn and do my commande-
mente as thou arte to me
leef and dere spare not
but throwe it in.

Than syr Bedwere retorned
ageyn and took the swerde
in hys hande, and than
hym thought synne and
shame to throw awaye
that nobyl swerde, and so ofte
he hydde the swerde.

But now delay not; take Excalibur
And fling him far into the middle mere;
Watch what thou seest, and lightly
bring me word.

Yet I thy hest will all perform at
full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring
thee word.

For all the haft twinkled with
diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and
jacinth-work.

but at last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur concealed
There in the many knotted water-flags
That whistled stiff and dry about
the marge...

So strode he slow back to the wounded
king,
Then spake king Arthur to sir Bedivere:
"Hast you perform'd my mission which
I gave?"

What is it thou has seen, or what has
heard?
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
I heard the ripple washing in the
reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.

Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go
again
As thou are lief and dear, and do
the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring
me word.

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy
note.

And hid Excalibur the second time.

.... and then he sayd
to hym self yf I throwe this
ryche swerde in the water
thereof shal never come
good but harme and loss.

and retorned ageyn and tolde
to the kyng that he had
ben at the water and done
his commandementes.

What sawe thou there sayd
the kyng. Syr he sayd I
sawe no thyng but the
waters wappe and the waves
wanne.

A traytour vntrewe sayd
Kyng Arthur how hast thou
betrayed me twyse. Who
wold haue wente that
thou hast been to me so
leef and dere and thou arte
named a nobel knyghte and
wolde betraye me for the
richesse of the swerde.

But now go ageyn lyghtly
for thy longe taryeng putteth
me in grete jeopardye of my
lyf.

For I have taken colde,
and but yf thou do now as
I byd the, yf ever I may see the But if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I shal slee the wyth myn owne I will arise and slay thee with my
handes, for thou woldest hands.
for my ryche swerde see
me dede.

Then syr Bedwere
departed and wente to
the swerde and lyghtly
took it up, and wente to
the water syde and there
he bounde the gyrdyl aboute
the hyltes, and thenne he
threwe the swerde as
farre in to the water as
he myght.

What good should follow this, if this
were done?
What harm, undone?

And so strode back slow to the wounded
king.
Then spake King Arthur, breathing
heavily:

What is it thou hast seen, or what
has heard?
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the
reeds.'

'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue...

Thou wouldst betray me for the
precious hilt;

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and
ran,
... And strongly wheel'd and threw it.

and there cam an arme and
 an hande aboue the water
 and mette it, and caught
 it and so shoke it
 thryse and braundysshed,
 and than vanysshed awaye
 the hande wyth the
 swerde in the water.

So syr Bedwere came
 ageyn to the king, and
 told him what he had seen.

Alas sayd the kyng helpe
 me hens for I drede me I
 have taryed over longe...

(for I have taken colde...)

Then syr Bedwere toke the
 kyng vpon his baske and
 so wente wyth him to
 that water syde...

And whan they were at the
 water syde, euyng fast by
 the banke housd a lytyl
 barge wyth many fayr
 ladyes in hit, and
 emonge hem al was a quene,
 and al they had blacke hoodes,
 and al they wepte and
 shryked whan they sawe
 Kyng Arthur.

Now put me in to the
 barge, sayd the king, and
 so he dyd softelye. And
 there recyved him thre
 quenes wyth grete
 mornynge and soo they
 sette hem down, and in
 one of their lappes kyng
 Arthur layed hys heed.

But ere he dipt the surface, rose and arm
 Cloth'd in white samite, mystic,
 wonderful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and
 brandish'd him
 Three times, and drew him under in
 the mere.

And lightly went the other to the king...

..... yet I fear
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die

Then took with care, and kneeling on one
 knee,
 O'er both his shoulders drew the languid
 hands...

The saw they how there hove a dusky barge
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to
 stern
 Beneath them; and descending they were
 ware
 That all the decks were dense with
 stately forms
 Black- stoled, black-hooded, like a
 dream - by these
 Three queens with crowns of gold - and
 from them rose
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling
 stars.

Then murmur'd Arthur 'Place me in the
 barge,'
 And to the barge they came. There those
 three queens
 Put forth their hands, and took the king,
 and wept.
 But she that rose the tallest of them all
 And fairest laid his head upon her lap...

and than that quene sayd
a dere broder why have
ye teryed so longe from
me. Alas this wounde on
your heed hath caught
overmoche colde. And soo
than they rowed from the
londe, and syre bedwere
beheld all the ladyes goo
from hym.

Than syr Bedwere cryed a
my lord Arthur what shal
become of me now ye goo
from me. And leve me here
allone emonge myn
enayes.

Comfort thyself sayd the
kyng and doo as wel as
thou mayst, for in me is
no truste for to truste in.

For I wyl in the vale of
auylyon to hele me of
my greuous wounde. And
yf thou here neuer more
of me praye for my soul.

but ever the quenes and
ladyes wepte and shryked
that hit was pyte to here.
And as sone as syr Bedwere
had loste the syghte of
the barge he wepte and
waylled and so took the
foreste, and so he wente
all that nyght, and in
the mornynge he was ware
betwixte two holles hore
of a chapel and an
ernytage.

And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed
his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining
loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood....

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
.....
And I, the last, go forth companionless
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.
.....
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?

..... but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul.
..... I am going a long way,
To the island-valley of Avilion....
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink....

Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of
dawn
And on the mere the wailing died away.

From this comparison it appears that Tennyson follows Malory's
account closely, expanding a hint into a whole new detail in places,
such as his expansion of the 'precious stones' into a particular

description of the gems: "diamond sparks/Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work"; and sometimes rearranging Malory's material to make a more dramatic presentation, such as saving the phrase describing the king's predicament and the need for haste now he is wounded, "for I have taken colde" from the time just before Bedivere disposes of the sword to the more dramatically appropriate moment after the king has heard the sword is disposed of, and now all that remains is for him to be borne to Avalon. But nothing dramatically essential or picturesque in Malory is omitted.

Though Tennyson himself in the poem entitled The Epic which gives a setting for the Morte d'Arthur, makes one of the characters, the poet Everard Hall, dismiss the poem as "mere Homeric echoes, nothing worth," the style, as commentators have pointed out, has more the marmoreal quality of Virgil's work than that of Homer.¹ It seems, too, though the evidence is not very strong, that Tennyson was influenced in his choice of diction by translations from Anglo-Saxon verse,² first given in J.F. Conybeare's Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1826).

1. 'It is called "an Homeric echo" (sic) but the diction bears a much closer resemblance to that of Virgil than to that of Homer, though the rhythm is perhaps more Homeric than Virgilian.' Prefactory note to the 'Morte d'Arthur' in The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1900), p.142, J. Churton Collins.
2. A good example of Tennyson's preoccupation with the Anglo-Saxon basis of English during these early years is the remarkable poem What Thor said to the Bard before Dinner (circa 1842). The poem is published in Unpublished Early Poems (1931) edited by Charles (later Sir Charles) Tennyson.

This would have provided him with a suitable model, as far as the diction is concerned, for his English epic. As is well known, the diction and imagery of Wordsworth's blank verse is also manifest in the Morte d'Arthur.¹

Though there is no proof Tennyson had consciously studied Conybeare, he was from 1834 a good friend of J.M. Kemble, the Anglo-Saxon lecturer at Cambridge, who might have introduced him to Conybeare's work.² Conybeare had translated the most vivid passages from Beowulf and other Anglo-Saxon poems into powerful verse, preserving as many of the older words as it was possible to do in the circumstances. Though we are now accustomed to this choice of diction, particularly since the work of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Gerard Manley Hopkins, in its own day the Illustrations must have had a marked effect upon poets and writers. As it is, Conybeare himself

1. A notable example seems the description of the skaters, Prelude (1805 version) Book I 465-473, which Tennyson must have had in mind when writing Bedivere's descent to the mere with the wounded king:-
 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
 And not a voice was idle; with the din,
 Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
 The leafless trees, and every icy crag
 Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
 Into the tumult sent an alien sound
 Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
 Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
 The orange sky of evening died away.
2. In a letter of Nov. 27th 1833 (Memoir I, 129), Stephen Spring Rice notes he is sending a folio of Saxo-Grammaticus from Kemble to Tennyson. Some time in December in an undated letter (Memoir I, 13) Tennyson congratulates Kemble on publishing his edition of Beowulf.



noticed parallels between the Saxon and the Homeric epic styles.¹ I append two of Conybeare's translations, where it is possible the choice of diction and the presentation of the action may have influenced Tennyson.²

For his description of the "island valley of Avilion.....

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea"

1. "It can hardly have escaped notice that the Scandinavian bard, in the general style and complexion of his poetry, approaches much more nearly to the father of the Grecian epic, than to the romancers of the Middle Ages. If I mistake not, this similarity will readily be traced in the simplicity of his plan, in the air of probability given to all its details, even when the subject may be termed supernatural; in the length of some of the speeches introduced, and in their frequent digression to matters of contemporary or previous history." Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1826)p.79.

2. The approach of the Grendel:

"Soon he reach'd,
a joyless quest, that hall; soon, unopposed,
With giant arm fierce in his wrath dash'd down
Her iron-banded gates; and now he trod
Her chequer'd floor, angry of soul he moved,
A fiendish foe; and flamelike as he strode,
Shot from his eyes a sad and hideous light,
There might he see the heroes at their rest-
A band of brothers. Then his heart was glad,
For sooth he thought, or ere the morrow dawn'd,
From each man's corpse to drain the blood of life."
Canto XI, p.46

and of the successful return of the warrior:

"But first, in payment of the warden's care,
The generous chieftain gave a noble brand
Radiant with gold, such as in after time
Might grace him joyous in the feast of mead;
Then sought his bark, and o'er the water deep
Drove gallantly, and lost the Danic strand.
.....
Fair sped the courser of the waves, - the spray
Foam'd sparkling round her arch'd and golden neck,
So pass'd the deep flood, till full in sight
Their native cliffs and well-known headlands rose."
Canto XXVII p 62-3.

which is not given in Malory,¹ Tennyson may have drawn from the description of Avalon given as a note to the translation of Sir Lanfal:²

On the main ocean's wave encompass'd, stands
 A memorable isle, fill'd with all good:
 No thief, nor spoiler there, no wily foe
 With stratagem of wasteful war; no rage
 Of heat intemperate, or of winter's cold;
 But spring, fullblown, with peace and concord reigns:
 Prime bliss of heart and season, fittest join'd!
 Flowers fail not there; the lily and the rose,
 With many a knot of fragrant violets bound;
 And, loftier, clustering down the bended boughs,
 Blossom with fruit combin'd, rich apples hang.
 Beneath such mantling shades for ever dwell
 In virgin innocence and honour pure,
 Damsels and youths, from age and sickness free,
 And ignorant of wo, and fraught with joy,
 In choice community of all things blest.
 for his deep wound and wide
 Great Arthur sought relief."

A more doubtful source is the description of the heavenly isle in

The Phoenix:³

"In the sea's bosom, rich in odorous sweets,
 The lonely islet stands....
 there nor rain, nor snow,
 Nor the frost's fetters, nor the blast of fire,
 Nor hail swift falling, nor the hoary rime,
 Nor the sun's parching heat, nor winter's cold,
 May aught intrude; but firm amid the wave
 Still clad in verdure stands that blessed realm"

1. The only description connected in any way with Avalon that Malory has occurs in Book I Chapter XXV regarding the island of the Lady of the Lake: "and within that lake is a roche, and theryn is as fayr a place as ony on erthe and rychly besene."
2. Note to the Lay of Sir Lanfal in G.L. Way's translation of Le Grand's Fabliaux (1815) Vol II p 233-234. Tennyson was acquainted with Way's Fabliaux, judging by his use of stock phrases and courtly epithets only to be found in this collection.
3. The Phoenix, a poem translated from the Anglo-Saxon by J.F. Conybeare in Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1826) p 226.

Also, Tennyson undoubtedly had in his mind the descriptions of Olympus, the seat of the Gods, in Odyssey vi:

"Not by winds is it shaken, nor ever wet with rain,
nor doth the snow come nigh thereto, but most clear air is
spread about it cloudless, and the white light floats over it."¹

Various histories of Cornwall may have been drawn on for certain details in the poem, but as the evidence for this is circumstantial, I have placed the details in a footnote.²

There are still some details of the poem which seem to be entirely of Tennyson's own invention. First there is the location of the action at a mere (Malory has the sea). Various sources have been

1. Translation of Odyssey VI 42-45, by Butcher and Lang (1921)
A similar description, but of Elysium, occurs Odyssey IV, when Proteus tells Menelaus that the deathless Gods are to take him away "to the Elysian plain.... where life is easiest for men. No snow is there, nor yet great storm, nor any rain; but alway ocean sendeth forth the breeze of the shrill West to blow cool on men."
2. In Antiquities Historical and Monumental of the County of Cornwall (2nd. ed. 1769) William Borlase notes (p40) that Arthur was the first king of Cornwall; the bones of giants are cited (p237), which might have given Tennyson his idea of the place of tombs "Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men/Old knights..." and Borlase records the Cornish attitude to things of great size and age: "And whatever is great, and the use and Authour unknown, is in Cornwall, for the most part, attributed to King Arthur." (p239) Something that might have made Tennyson decide to site his action on a "dark strait of barren land" between the mere where the sword is thrown, and the sea, are the descriptions of Lo-Pool or Le Vine (Swan) Pool, lakes formed by sand bars at the confluences of two rivers with the sea. Most county histories stress these sand bars, particularly Samuel and Daniel Lysons' Magna Britannia (1814) Vol III. Another explanation of the "dark strait of barren land" is that it might have been thought the connecting strand between Lyonesse and the mainland.
Lyonesse itself features in all the county histories, and the best account of it is to be found in A History of Cornwall (1816) by Hitchins and Drew.

suggested as the origin of the mere rather than the sea for the return of the sword.¹ And yet, as the hand which gave the sword in the beginning arose from a "lake the whiche was fayr water and brood,"² it would only be natural to return the sword to the same sacred place, and so Tennyson, in effect, is making Malory's story more consistent.³ There are other advantages apart from consistency, however, The location of the action at a mere rather than the sea allows full play to the noise of heavy breathing, the rattle of armour, etc., and gives the effect

1. In a book on speculative theology, The Origin of Pagan Idolatry Ascertained (1816) George Stanley Faber presses the Arthurian legend into service (Vol III, 317ff) to help to prove the Helio-Arkite theory of the Deluge. In W.D. Paden's Tennyson in Egypt (A study of the imagery of his earlier work), Lawrence, Kansas, 1942, attention is drawn to Faber's work and its possible influence on some poems, including (p81) the Morte d'Arthur. Paden thinks the choice of mere for the action rather than Malory's sea was due to fact that Faber stresses Druid ritual ceremonies were performed at lakes. But there is no evidence that Tennyson had read Faber; and I think it is much more likely that one source among many is the association with Lake Avernus, entrance to the underworld, and its description in Aeneid VI.

It may not be entirely irrelevant to recall that in the North Lincolnshire dialect during the eighteenth century and later, the word 'mere', as well as meaning a small body of standing water, meant a boundary or limit. If the word had such dialect overtones to Tennyson, he might well have preferred it on these grounds than to retain the idea of the sea.

2. Malory Book I Chapter XXIII
3. Curiously, one of the Arthurian accounts Tennyson would not know (Morte Artu, not published till 1909-10) has the sword thrown into a lake; and more curiously still, Enys Tregarthen in his Introduction to Legends and Tales of North Cornwall (1906) states that the desolate Dozmary Pool far inland but near the site of the battle of Camlan, was indeed the pool where Arthur had Bedivere throw the sword. Thus the variant location for the disposal of the sword devised by Tennyson in his Morte d'Arthur, coupled with the fact that Dozmary Pool was supposed to be haunted in Cornish tradition, have given rise to a modern legend.

of stillness and fixity in the frozen landscape in a way which could not be obtained if all took place on the shore of a sea. Then there is the atmosphere of ruin and desolation accented by the midwinter weather, which seems to be Tennyson's own. Arthur's homilies are likewise Tennyson's own creation, but are consistent with the character of the king portrayed in Malory. Finally there is the idea of the year-cycle, an idea which was developed considerably when the Idylls came to be written, and which also seems to have been Tennyson's own creation.¹

Various explanations have been given of Tennyson's choice of the Morte episode as the first part of his intended Arthurian cycle to complete,² but as good a reason as any is the dramatic and pictorial

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1. Paden considers the idea of the year-cycle was borrowed from Faber's idea of eternal recurrence in the Druidic mysteries (Faber III, 134-5) and that the Round Table as 'an image of the mighty world' comes from Faber as well as Malory. But the ideas of eternal recurrence and metempsychosis are at the root of most mythological systems, and are commonly to be found expressed in many classical authors with which Tennyson would be familiar (Virgil Georgicon IV 206-227 etc.,) And surely Malory Book XIV Chapter II 'How Merlin likened the Round Table to the world' is sufficient as a source for Tennyson's "image of the mighty world."
 2. Paden suggests (p86) that King Arthur is really a portrait of Dr. Charles Tennyson, who died in 1831, rather than Hallam, who died in 1833, the year in which the poem is thought to have been begun. It could be argued, for that matter, that it is a picture of the poet himself, spiritually wounded, renouncing the world until the time he can become strong again. Now, admittedly his father's death and the death of his best friend might make the Morte episode of Malory of particular significance to Tennyson at this time. But King Arthur is King Arthur, and if we seek to deduce who lurks behind his kingly mask, we are no longer in the province of literature, but in a nether-world in which the reader's own abstruse reckonings take on an equal importance with the figure deliberately created or adopted by the poet to express a whole world of values or experiences. Investigations of this kind do not add to our proper understanding of the poem at all.

force of Malory's account of Arthur's passing, perhaps the most vivid incident of all his episodes of Arthurian story, as well as the general significance of such a funereal episode to Tennyson at this time.

Therefore in Tennyson's early Arthurian poetry there are three principal things to be observed about his use of sources. Firstly, there is his skill in taking exact details from Arthurian story and making poetry from them, as is shown quite amazingly in the use of Malory's narrative of the passing of the King (Book XXI chs IV and V) for the Morte d'Arthur. Secondly, one notes how often the merest suggest or hint can give rise to a whole new episode, such as is shown in The Lady of Shalott and in the almost complete invention of the beginning of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship in the fragment Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere. Thirdly, Tennyson was already handling the legend quite freely to suit his own artistic purpose, as can be seen in his borrowing from the accounts of other Grail heroes to add to the characterisation and experiences of Galahad in Sir Galahad. Also it is noticeable that Tennyson has recourse to non-Arthurian sources such as Keightley and Crofton Croker for some of the atmosphere in The Lady of Shalott, and possibly to current translations and selections of Anglo-Saxon poetry for the style and diction in which he composed the Morte d'Arthur.

There is one further observation to be made, namely, that from early on, indeed from the time of the composition of the Morte d'Arthur

in 1833 or 1834, it was Tennyson's purpose to use the legend as a commentary upon his own times, in which the older aristocratic way of life which preceded the era of political and industrial revolution was being replaced by a new and troubled society, and all the revolutionary ideals which had brought about such a transformation were gradually being abandoned. In this context Tennyson's aim in utilising the Arthurian legend as a means of speaking to his own age is particularly evident in the two plans of a play or masque which date from the time of the Morte d'Arthur, (and which are discussed later in the present thesis) and from the homiletic strain in the Morte d'Arthur itself, where the dying king, seeing that the "old order changeth", says:

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep and goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God. (298-306)

This exhortation, though it is addressed in the poem to the weary and lonely Bedivere, is also addressed to every reader, as a statement of faith in troubled times.

CHAPTER III

The Evolution of the Idylls of the King

"Alfred is.... a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom - carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos!"¹

Various things must be considered before I examine Tennyson's development from poems on Arthurian themes to an epic which would work the already composed episodes in. Firstly I review briefly his early Arthurian poems, in order to show what they indicate of his interest in the legend as a whole. Then there are four Arthurian sketches he made when he first contemplated a large work on the theme. After I examine these there is the poem The Epic (published in 1842) into which the Morte d'Arthur (begun 1833 or 34) is set. In addition I examine a variety of evidence from memoirs, biographies and diaries showing Tennyson's interests in, and opinions and discussions of the legends from the 1840's down to his writing the first of the Idylls in 1856. Then I trace the actual evolution of what finally became the twelve books of the Idylls of the King.

1. The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson 1834-1872 (Boston 1886) Vol II, p 66.

It is difficult to date precisely much of Tennyson's early poetry¹ because evidence is scanty. The first version of The Lady of Shalott was in circulation in 1831,² and the first version of The Palace of Art dates from 1832.³ Sir Charles Tennyson dates the poems Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere and Sir Galahad as either sketched or completed in 1833,⁴ and he thinks that the first draft of the Morte d'Arthur may date from this year also.⁵ Certainly the Morte d'Arthur was completed in a first version the following year, and this version was copied out in October of that year.⁶ At any rate, in approximately three years Tennyson had composed no less than five poems on different aspects of the Arthurian legend.

1. Odd letters are preserved in the Memoir, but there are many gaps, and all the correspondence between Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, which surely would have thrown considerable light on Tennyson's early projects, was burned (Memoir I, 71).
2. In Memoir I, 82 Hallam Tennyson records Alfred Tennyson's first meeting with Fanny Kemble in the summer or autumn of 1831, and notes that she was very enthusiastic "over some of the manuscript poems in the forthcoming volume, especially 'The Lady of Shalott.'" "
3. There are no references in letters to The Palace of Art before 1832, but on 10 April 1832 A.H. Hallam refers ambiguously to it as if it was being composed then: "All (the Apostles) were anxious for 'The Palace of Art' etc., and fierce with me for not bring more." Memoir I, 85. It was circulating in Cambridge that summer. Memoir I, 86.
4. Tennyson 146
5. ibid 146
6. Undated letter to James Spedding (1834): "I cannot write the 'Suicide' (The Two Voices) for you, 'tis too long, nor 'Morte d'Arthur,' which I myself think the best thing I have managed lately, for 'tis likewise too long." Memoir I. 142
Memoir I, 138 states: "In October 1834, he told Tennant he was busy copying out his 'Morte d'Arthur.'"

These poems treated in symbolic form Blaine's love for Lancelot and her death; alluded to a picture or scene of the "deeply wounded child of Pendragon" which the poet placed on the wall of one of the rooms in his ideal palace of art; invented a situation where the young Lancelot fell passionately in love with Queen Guinevere; showed Galahad's inspiration as he undertook the quest of the Grail; and composed in an heroic manner the episode of the return of the sword Excalibur to the mere from which it was first received and the king's subsequent voyage to Avalon. Clearly Tennyson was fascinated by the legend and its literary possibilities.

Four interesting MSS. notes survive, which show the scope of Tennyson's interest in Arthurian subjects at this time. First of all there is a short historical note about Arthur (undated):

He lived about 500 A.D. and defeated his enemies in a pitched battle in the Welsh kingdom of Strathclyde; and the earliest allusions to him are to be found in the Welsh bards of the seventh century. In the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth collected the legends about him as an European conqueror in his History of the Britons; and translated them from Celtic into Latin. The Morte d'Arthur by Sir Thomas Malory was printed by Caxton in 1485.¹

This note shows that Tennyson had done some research on King Arthur, and that from early on in his consideration of the subject he was not necessarily limited to Malory's version of Arthurian story.

A second MSS. note which dates sometime between 1833-40 survives, in which a good deal of Arthurian story as given in Malory, but with

1. Memoir II, 121. Though no date is given for this sketch, it is set in the context of one of the prose histories he had written out "from his earliest years."

many subtle additions and omissions of Tennyson's own, is adapted in a scenario for a play or masque.¹ As it is very informative, I give it in full:

First Act

Sir Mordred and his party. Mordred inveighs against the King and the Round Table. The knights, and the quest. Mordred scoffs at the Ladies of the Lake, doubts whether they are supernatural beings, etc., Mordred's cringing interview with Guinevere. Mordred and the Lady of the Lake. Arthur lands in Albion.

Second Act

Lancelot's embassy and Guinevere. The Lady of the Lake meets Arthur and endeavours to persuade him not to fight with Sir Mordred. Arthur will not be moved from his purpose. Lamentation of the Lady of the Lake. Elaine. Marriage of Arthur.

Third Act

Oak tomb of Merlin. The song of Nimue. Sir Mordred comes to consult Merlin. Coming away meets Arthur. Their fierce dialogue. Arthur consults Sir L. and Sir Bedivere. Arthur weeps over Merlin and is reproved by Nimue, who inveighs against Merlin. Arthur asks Merlin the issue of the battle. Merlin will not enlighten him. Nimue requests Arthur to question Merlin again. Merlin tells him he shall bear rule again, but that the Ladies of the Lake can return no more. Guinevere throws away the diamonds into the river. The court and the dead Elaine.

Fourth Act

Discovery by Mordred and Nimue of Lancelot and Guinevere. Arthur and Guinevere's meeting and parting.

Fifth Act

The battle. Chorus of the Ladies of the Lake. The throwing away of Excalibur and departure of Arthur.

1. Memoir II, 124. The note accompanying it states: "Before 1840, it is evident that my father wavered between casting the Arthurian legends into the form of an epic or into that of a musical masque; but in one of his 1833-1840 MS. books there is the following rough draft of a scenario into which the Lancelot and Elaine scenes were afterwards introduced."

Already, even from this disjointed evidence it is plain that such aspects of the traditional Arthurian story as the Merlin-Nimue relationship, the episodes of Elaine's love for Lancelot and her subsequent death, and of Mordred's treachery were to be included, though not, apparently, the Quest of the Grail.

A third MSS., a mere passage of imaginative description, suggested perhaps by William Borlase's Antiquities Historical and Monumental of the County of Cornwall (2nd ed. 1769) which refers to Arthur's Hall in Cornwall,¹ states:

On the latest limit of the West in the land of Lyonesse, where, save the rocky Isles of Scilly, all is now wild sea, rose the sacred Mount of Camelot. It rose from the deeps with gardens and bowers and palaces, and at the top of the Mount was King Arthur's hall, and the holy Minster with the Cross of gold. Here dwelt the King in glory apart, while the Saxons whom he had overthrown in twelve battles ravaged the land, and ever came nearer and nearer.

The Mount was the most beautiful in the world, sometimes green and fresh in the beam of morning, sometimes all one splendour, folded in the golden mists of the West. But all underneath it was hollow, and the mountain trembled, when the seas rushed bellowing through the porphyry caves; and there ran a prophecy that the mountain and the city on some wild morning would topple into the abyss and be no more. It was night. The King sat in his Hall. Beside him sat the sumptuous Guinevere and about him were all his lords and knights of the Round Table. There they² feasted, and when the feast was over the Bards sang to the King's glory.

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1. "Round Arthur's Bed, on a rocky Tor in the parish of North-hill, there are many (rock basins), which the country people call Arthur's Troughs, in which he used to feed his Dogs. Near by also, is Arthur's Hall; and whatever is great, and the use and Author unknown, is in Cornwall, for the most part, attributed to King Arthur...." Antiquities, 241. Also: "He is said to have been born at Tintagel Castle in Cornwall; and in the country near that place, everything that is grand, uncommon, or inexplicable, is attributed to this Arthur. Here we have his Hall, his Bed, his Way to Church, and the like..." Antiquities, 408.
 2. Memoir II, 122

The fourth of the MSS. notes I mentioned on page 61 outlines sketchily the symbolic scheme Tennyson devised as basis for some treatment of an Arthurian epic, story or drama. From the sketch it would seem the projected Arthurian poem or drama was to have been on a considerable scale:--

K.A. Religious Faith

King Arthur's three Guineveres

The Lady of the Lake?

two Guineveres. ye first prim. Xy. 2d Roman Catholicism. ye first is put away and dwells apart. 2d Guinevere flies. Arthur takes to the first again but finds her changed by lapse of Time.

Mordred the sceptical understanding. he pulls Guinevere Arthur's latest wife from the throne.

Merlin Emrys the enchanter. Science. marries his daughter to Modred. Excalibur war.

the sea. the people	}	the S. are a seapeople and it is theirs and a type of them.
the Saxons the people		

the Round Table liberal institutions

Battle of Camlan.

2 Guinevere with the enchanted book and cup₁

From these four notes it appears that Tennyson diligently consulted the various sources of Arthurian story known at the time; that he intended to write an Arthurian poem or masque of considerable scope, which would bring in many episodes from Malory's cycle; that he freely altered, omitted and invented wherever he saw fit; and that he was grappling to use the Arthurian theme as an expression of the problems of his own times. Such anticipations in these early notes of features in the Idylls will be noticed later when I discuss the sources of each Idyll.

1. Memoir II, 123 The three Guineveres are noted in The Bardic Museum (1802) p 21, compiled by Edward Jones; in Pugh's The Cambrian Biography (1804), and particularly in Edward Davies' The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids (1809) p. 187. This book on bardism is one that Tennyson knew later, as details in the Idylls confirm. Other references to three Guineveres can be found in Way's Fabliaux (1815) Vol I, 207 and in Holinshed Book V Chapter XIV.

Now The Epic has to be considered. The introductory lines of The Epic tell how it happened that the Morte d'Arthur was read at a party on Xmas Eve. Four men, Francis Allen the host, Holmes the parson, the poet Everard Hall and the narrator of the incident (whose name is not disclosed) are sitting late into the evening. They have exhausted most topics of conversation. The narrator dozes. When he awakes it is to hear the parson expatiating 'upon the general decay of faith' in the world. This subject is made fun of by Francis Allen and Everard Hall, in an attempt to lighten the conversation; and at this point the narrator asks Everard Hall about his poetry. However it is the host who replies:

'You know, said Frank, 'he burnt
His epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books' -
And then to me demanding why? 'Oh sir,
He thought that nothing new was said, or else
Something so said 'twas nothing - that a truth
Looks freshest in the fashion of the day:
God knows: he has a mint of reasons: ask.
It pleased me well enough.'

(The Epic 27-34)

Then Hall himself replies to their questions:

'Nay, nay,' said Hall,
'Why take the style of those heroic times?
For Nature brings not back the Mastodon,
Nor we those times; and why should any man
Remodel models? these twelve books of mine
Were faint Homeric echoes, nothing-worth,
Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt.'

(34 - 40)

Francis Allen then intervenes with the news that he has:

pick'd the eleventh from this hearth
And have it: keep a thing, its use will come.
I hoard it as a sugar plum for Holmes.'

(41-43)

Finally the narrator requests Allen to bring the eleventh book. It is brought, and the poet Hall, after some disparaging remarks about it, reads 'mouthing out his hollow oes and aes.'

The poem he reads begins, as it were, in mediis rebus. After a great battle in Lyonesse in which all his knights save one have been killed, the sorely wounded King Arthur requests that this knight, Bedivere, throw the famous sword Excalibur into a nearby mere which runs parallel to the sea. Twice through greed Bedivere fails to throw the sword, hiding it instead among the rushes. The third time, after the king has threatened to kill him if it is not done, Bedivere throws the sword into the mere and it is received by a hand 'clad in white samite, mystic, wonderful.' Bedivere then bears his king to the mere, where a barge awaits to take him to Avalon. The incident ends with Bedivere striving to see the barge as it fades into the distance.

The concluding lines of The Epic relate how the parson has fallen asleep during the reading. Then Francis Allen dismisses the work as a trifle, lacking modern significance, and as if to symbolise this he stamps out the last sparks of the log smouldering in the hearth. They go to bed, but the anonymous narrator of the whole incident dreams that he sails with Arthur 'under looming shores' until the dawn when, awaiting in a crowd:

There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port; and all the people cried,
'Arthur is come again; he cannot die.'

(344-347)

All the others in the crowd rejoice at Arthur's return, and state that 'war will be no more.' Then bells peal and the narrator awakes to hear the church bells ring in the Christmas morn.

This, then, is The Epic. From an examination of it, several things can be seen. Francis Allen considers Everard Hall's poem an epic of twelve books, Everard Hall states that he has burnt it. The anonymous narrator says the reasons for the burning of the epic were that nothing new was said in it. Then Hall himself dismisses his epic in twelve books as derivative, 'mere Homeric echoes.' Moreover he says the times it depicted are as extinct as a mastodon. Francis Allen, however, has salvaged the eleventh book from his hearth, and has stored it away. He produces it, whereupon Hall reads the work.

Now this is a very light treatment of an epic, to burn it in a neighbour's hearth, and it seems Tennyson devised the lines after the episode of the Morte d'Arthur was written,¹ for two reasons. First it is to play down the importance of the poem itself, as if it were of little significance. Secondly, it is to justify the printing of a fragment of what was known to be a great story.

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1. The setting of the Morte d'Arthur into the whole poem known as The Epic did not take place till a few years after the writing of the Morte d'Arthur itself (as Edward FitzGerald notes in Memoir I, 189 and 194). The setting was probably composed in the High Beech days (1837-40) particularly as there is a reference to the narrator cutting eights upon the pond and bruising himself. Memoir I, 150 records that at High Beech (1837) "There was a pond on the park on which in winter my father might be seen skating, sailing about on the ice in his long blue cloak."

Whether from the evidence we have here Tennyson had considered, like his poet Everard Hall, executing an epic on the Arthurian subject, we do not know. Other evidence regarding this will be considered later. What is certain, however, is that Tennyson knew the subject was potentially epical, and a proper treatment of all of it would extend to something like epic proportions.¹

There is nothing in the poem, the Morte d'Arthur itself, to warrant that it was part of a greater whole, barring the beginning 'in mediis rebus,' which could be contrived to begin abruptly in the approved classical manner of epic.

As far as the concluding lines to The Epic are concerned, there are several things to note. First, in the dream of the unknown narrator of the whole incident, the dream manifests that in his mind the Arthurian legend - in contradistinction to the attitudes to it of Everard Hall, parson Holmes and Francis Allen - is suitable to convey meaning to the times. Also expressed at the conclusion to the poem is the thought that Arthur might come again, or the figure of Arthur might still be employed to convey meaning to modern times; and in the mind of the narrator the heroic king is connected with Christ.

1. Tennyson probably knew that Milton had considered an epic treatment of it before he settled on his theme; and he may have known that Dryden had at one time thought it suitable for epic.

Now, though The Epic proves that Tennyson merely toyed with the idea of writing an epic poem on the subject of King Arthur circa 1833 when the Morte d'Arthur was begun, many years later (after 1869) he stated:-

At twenty four I meant to write an epic or drama of King Arthur; and I thought that I should take twenty years about the work. They will now say I have been forty years about it.¹

This statement proves that at 24 (1833-34) Tennyson planned to write a large work based on the Arthurian legend, and was then undecided whether to exploit the dramatic or epic potential of Arthurian story. This indecision about the use to which the Arthurian legends were to be put is evident in the MS. notes which have been considered previously, I have footnoted further fragmentary evidence from the testimony of friends that it was an epic rather than a drama Tennyson contemplated, as this information dates from many years after the Morte d'Arthur was written.²

1. Stated by Tennyson to his son Hallam, at some time, but recorded with the events in 1869, Memoir II, 89.
2. Evidence is scattered and often contradictory. Tennyson's friend William Allingham (the friendship dates from 1851) noted in his diary under the date 16 Oct 1881 that the episode of the Morte d'Arthur was not really the eleventh of twelve books as originally planned, William Allingham, A Diary ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford, (1907) 314. Allingham, however, does not go on to say what book the Morte d'Arthur really was. Benjamin Jowett (whose friendship with Tennyson dates from 1852) was of the opinion that the original epic of which the Morte d'Arthur is part, consisted of only ten books. The Letters of Benjamin Jowett ed. Abbott and Campbell (1899) Vol. I, 172. He says nothing else about the projected epic or which part of it the Morte d'Arthur was supposed to be. W.E.H. Lecky (who became Tennyson's friend in 1878) noted that the poet "had originally intended to write twelve 'Idylls,' one for each knight of the Round Table." Tennyson and His Friends, 203. It is possible that this was also the earlier plan Tennyson had in mind.

Why did Tennyson abandon the Arthurian project (or projects) after he had written several successful Arthurian poems, and had treated an important episode in an heroic manner? The poet himself gave as a reason John Sterling's unsympathetic review of the 1842 volume,¹ particularly his remarks on the Morte d'Arthur, which was dismissed as:-

..... less costly jewel work, with fewer of the broad flashes of passionate imagery, than some others, and not compensating for this inferiority by any stronger human interest. The miraculous legend of Excalibar (sic) does not come very near to us, and as reproduced by an modern writer must be a mere ingenious exercise of fancy.²

This made Tennyson feel that his powers were not yet adequate to the task. Moreover because of unsettling circumstances during the years 1830-1850 he was neither in a position nor a frame of mind to consider a work of epic or near epic proportions,³ and his particular inclination ran to the composition of short or episodic pieces.⁴

1. Tennyson 297

2. The Quarterly Review LXX, September 1842, 401.

3. Sir Charles Tennyson's frank biography shows the difficulties during these years, including family jealousies, and their reduced means after Dr. Tennyson's death. Alfred's particular difficulties were manifold - having to leave Cambridge without a degree, his lack of a vocation, the death of his greatest friend and most stimulating mentor Arthur Hallam, the duties and responsibilities that devolved on him because of the singularity of other senior members of the family, the loss of what little money he had on a speculation, and the breaking of his engagement to Emily Sellwood.

4. He spoke of the years from 1838: "I felt certain then if I meant to make any mark at all, it must be by shortness, for the men before me had been so diffuse, and most of the big things except 'King Arthur' had been done." Memoir I, 166.

However, there is evidence to show that Tennyson did not leave the idea of it entirely during the years 1842-55, when he was concerned with poems on very different themes. The Princess (1842-47) is in a sense an exploration and preparation for the Idylls, because in it he tackled in a long episodic poem a modern theme, the education of women. The modern question was thinly disguised by the setting of the action in vaguely medieval times, with knights in armour, chivalry, and castles. This was Tennyson's device of "allegory in the distance," to cite Jowett's phrase descriptive of the way modern things were set in ancient surroundings in the Idylls themselves.¹ He was also writing short idyllic poems like Audley Court (1838) and Edwin Morris (1845). Frequently these poems were duologues, like much of the Idylls of the King, particularly the Idylls first composed. And at some time in these years he composed 300 lines on 'Lancelot's Quest of the Grail', but lost them through leaving them too long unwritten.²

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1. In Memoir I, 449 Jowett, speaking of Merlin and Vivien, states: "The allegory in the distance greatly strengthens, also elevates, the meaning of the poem."
 2. Memoir I 456-7 records the composition of the poem, and The Journals of Walter White (1898) 151, under the date 14 Aug. 1860 records the length of the work. It is interesting to speculate why it was specifically Lancelot's Quest of the Grail that Tennyson had considered, rather than Galahad's or Percivale's. Perhaps it was the wish to treat unfamiliar subjects offering scope (See Memoir II, 13), or perhaps he was seeking a way into the Arthurian cycle, and at that time had thought that Lancelot's quest of the Grail was the solution to the problem. The idea might have come from Scott's emphasis on Sir Lancelot's Quest of the Grail in the notes to Marmion (See Chapter I, footnote 2 of 17).

As was his habit in these early years, Tennyson was moving from place to place, and some of the places might well have suggested imagery to him, because of their real or fabled connection with King Arthur. In the summer of 1843 he was in Ireland, and at Ballybunion on the Atlantic coast the epic simile occurred to him:-

So dark a forethought roll'd about his brain,
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence.¹

This simile later found a place in Merlin and Vivien, where it describes Merlin's premonitions of his doom. It is hard to say whether he thought of a setting for the image at its time of composition, for it could be used to illustrate many situations of presage.

Then on a Cornish tour in June 1848 he visited the genial eccentric, Robert Stephen Hawker, the vicar of the parish of Morwenstowe, who enjoyed with him a considerable knowledge of the Arthurian legends and who had already written poems alluding to the Arthurian legend, and was to write before Tennyson himself considered it, a personal interpretation of the Grail legend. Fortunately Hawker carefully recorded Tennyson's visit and his intentions in making this Cornish trip:

Then seated on the brow of the Cliff, with Dundagel full in sight, he revealed to me the purpose of his journey to the West. He is about to conceive a Poem - the Hero King Arthur - the scenery in part the

1. Memoir I, 218.

vanished land of Lyonesse, between the mainland and the Scilly Isles. Much converse then and there befel of Arthur and his Queen, his wound at Camlan, and his prophesied return. Legends were exchanged, books noted down and references given, quae hic perscribere longum... I lent him Books and MSS, about King Arthur, which he carried off, and which perhaps I shall never see again.

Now this is valuable information¹, which shows that Tennyson's visit to Cornwall was part of the preparation he required to familiarise himself with known Arthurian terrain before he started writing poetry from the Arthurian legends and chronicles. Moreover the tone Hawker uses in describing the visit is for a work of considerable size, possibly epic in scale, particularly as it is to have a "Hero." Tennyson himself was so keen to obtain material from Hawker that the latter felt the poet would retain this material indefinitely.

Some seven months later, in January 1849, Tennyson was in Ireland visiting his friend Aubrey de Vere. de Vere notes Tennyson's pre-occupation with the Arthurian subject at this time, in a letter to a Miss Fenwick, 24 Jan 1849:-

My lonely life... is broken by a visit from Carlyle or Alfred Tennyson. The latter was here two days ago. He is more full than ever of King Arthur...²

Whether it was merely the theme or a poem projected upon the theme,

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1. The Life and Letters of R.S. Hawker, Vicar of Morwenstowe (1905) by C.E. Byles, p192, 193.
 2. Aubrey de Vere, A Memoir, by Wilfrid Ward (1904), 154. From de Vere's reference to Tennyson 'being more full than ever of King Arthur' it would seem that the earlier occasion they had met, in the early spring of 1848 (Tennyson 225), Tennyson had talked considerably of the Arthurian theme and its literary possibilities.

this note shows how much Tennyson was preoccupied with it at the time.

At the end of the same year W.M. Rossetti had met Tennyson, and he records the following information:-

His poem of King Arthur is not commenced, though he has for years past been maturing the conception of it; and he intends that it should occupy him for some fifteen years.¹

This, in the light of what Hawker and de Vere have said, points unmistakably to a work of epic or near epic scale that Tennyson contemplated writing, and that he intended starting about it soon.

A year later the subject was still in the air, for then Walter White, Assistant Secretary of the Royal Society, when he met Tennyson:- called his attention to the paper on Arthur and the Round Table in the Berlin Transactions.²

These observations indicate Tennyson was on the point of beginning his Arthurian poem in 1849-50. But in 1850 he married, and it is reasonable to suppose that for a year or two domestic commitments took his mind from the great work. Then he began a poem on the subject of Merlin in 1854,³ but abandoned it for the writing of Maud at Sir John

1. PraeRaphaelite Diaries and Letters (1900) ed. W.M. Rossetti, 238 under the heading of 18th Dec. 1849.
2. Entry for 15th Dec. 1850 in The Journals of Walter White (1898), 145
3. Sir Charles Tennyson notes, Tennyson 282, that about the middle of 1854 "Alfred had already begun work on a poem about the enchantment of Merlin, but he laid this aside for Maud, the composition of which occupied him during the last six months of 1854."

Simeon's instigation.¹ No other details regarding this abandoned poem have come down to us, not even whether it had any connection with Nimue (later Merlin and Vivien), the first of the Idylls, which was planned in 1856 and composed in 1857.

We must now consider the scope of Tennyson's readings in the Arthurian chronicles and romances. First there is the reading down to the writing of the first four Idylls in 1856-59; and secondly the developments down to the completion of the Idylls in 1874.

Tennyson was early conversant with the editions of Malory put out at the beginning of the century, particularly that entitled Kyng Arthur edited by Robert Southey.² While writing the Idylls he also had recourse to Wright's new edition of Malory put out in 1857.³ As far as other romances were concerned, he was aware of Ellis's series of abstracts entitled Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances in one of the editions from 1805 to the mid-century.⁴ With regard to the chronicles he knew Geoffrey of Monmouth early and his use of Gildas, Nennius and

1. Sir John Simeon had found the lines "O that 'twere possible," and gave him no peace until he had persuaded him to set about the poem. See Tennyson and His Friends, 309.
2. The Byrth, Lyf and Actes of Kyng Arthur (1817). As will be seen later, the notes of this edition of Malory provided Tennyson with material for Merlin and Vivien and other Idylls.
3. Malory's Morte d'Arthur edited by Thomas Wright (1857). Tennyson refers to it in the notes to the Idylls in Works (1913), and adopts its spellings for certain key characters in the Idylls.
4. For an abstract of this popular collection see Chapter I, 6. Tennyson used the collection for material in Lancelot and Elaine and other Idylls.

and Geoffrey is from the convenient compilation Sir Old English Chronicles (1848).¹ A later chronicle to which he also refers, Layamon's Brut, was first published in 1847.² The translation of the medieval Welsh tales entitled the Mabinogion was published in 1849.³ He was acquainted with books on Welsh legendry and bardism,⁴ and acquired a slight knowledge of the Welsh tongue.⁵ Thus it can be seen that by 1850 a writer who wished to treat the Arthurian story in chronicle and legend was in the fortunate position of having most of the material published, and interest in the legend running high.

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1. An observation on Geoffrey of Monmouth occurs in the historical sketch (one of three MS. notes referred to earlier in this chapter) which Tennyson made when first contemplating a great poem on Arthur. In the notes to Works (1913) Tennyson points out celebrated passages from this particular compilation of 1848.
 2. Layamon's Brut edited by Sir Frederick Madden in 1847. It is also referred to by Tennyson in the notes to Works.
 3. Mabinogion (1838-49), translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. It was used as the basis for one complicated tale that eventually became two Idylls, and used elsewhere also.
 4. Amongst many books Edward Davies' The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids (1809) is noteworthy, and Tennyson cites T. Stephens' The Literature of the Kymry (1849) in Works.
 5. In 'Alfred Tennyson as Celticist', Modern Philology XVIII (1921) T.P. Cross discusses Tennyson's knowledge of Welsh and concludes that though he probably read as much as he could of Welsh traditions in English, his own knowledge of Welsh was probably not extensive. Memoir I, 416 speaks of Tennyson reading various Welsh books including the Mabinogion while on his Welsh tour in 1856, but from this he would only gain a smattering of Welsh antiquity.

During the 1860's Tennyson kept abreast of the many developments in Arthurian studies. He surveyed one of the prose histories of the Grail for F.J. Furnivall before its publication in 1861,¹ and he was one of seventy five founder-subscribers to the Early English Text Society in 1864.² This society was established originally with the primary aim of publishing works of the Arthurian cycle. In 1861 he accepted the dedication of a book simplifying and bowdlerising the Arthurian legend mainly as presented in Malory,³ and as will be seen, his later friendship with the author stimulated him and helped him to complete the Idylls.

When I come to trace the multiplicity of sources and the use to which they are put in the chapters following on the various Idylls, it will be seen that Tennyson set about the stories only after acquainting himself thoroughly with them, and that he was careful to avoid Arthurian traditions that were still controversial.

The first Idyll to be composed was Merlin and Vivien. At least, this was the title of the Idyll when it was published as one of the four Idylls of the King in 1859. But originally it was named simply Nimue

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1. In the Preface xii to Vol.I of The Seynt Graal, or The Sank Ryal subtitled The History of the Holy Grail ed. F.J. Furnivall for the Roxburghe Club (I, 1861 and II, 1863) he states: "Any one who does not find the "things" "ful swete" can pass it by; enough for me to know that our great Victorian poet has glanced over these pages with interest; I trust he will accept them as a slight acknowledgement of the debt of gratitude all English-reading men now owe him."
 2. Frederick James Furnivall, A Record by John Munro et al. (1911), xlv.
 3. James, later Sir James T. Knowles's The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table (1861, dated 1862). In subsequent editions it was revised for style and renamed The Legends of King Arthur etc.,

and printed as such with the second Idyll, later Geraint and Enid, as Enid and Nimue,¹ or The True and the False in the summer of 1857. The idea of the poem was definitely taken up some time in 1855, if not the year before; a first draft of it was made during January or February of 1856;¹ and the Idyll was completed before the end of March. The second, Geraint and Enid, was begun in March or April of 1856² and completed in the spring of 1857, if not earlier.³ Guinevere, the next episode in the Arthurian story to be composed, was planned and in part

1. There are many discrepancies between the details of the Idylls given in Hallam's Memoir and that given in Sir Charles Tennyson's biography. Neither of the two books is without mistakes. Hallam records, Memoir I 414, that Merlin and Vivien was begun in February; but in Tennyson 299 it is stated that "the work was finished in rough by January 1856." Problems in regard to dating the Idylls are many. Tennyson was accustomed, certainly in the later Idylls and probably in some of the earlier also, to writing out plain prose versions of the tales so that he could "see the subject whole." What is recorded as the inception of an Idyll may sometimes be just the prose sketch of it. Moreover he continually altered, adjusted and extended separate Idylls as improvements to them of one kind or another suggested themselves, and it would seem he spoke of them as finished sometimes, when in fact there were other additions and extensions to come. These ambiguities cause difficulties in dating certain works with any exactness.
2. Memoir I 414 notes Geraint and Enid was begun 16 April 1856; but in Tennyson 300 it is said that the Idyll was begun as soon as Merlin and Vivien was finished (some time in March) and that "work on it was interrupted by the momentous decision taken at the beginning of April, to purchase Farringford."
3. Memoir I 415 records that Enid was "all but finished" in August 1856. It was privately printed and circulated along with Merlin and Vivien as Enid and Nimue or, The True and the False in the spring of 1857 (Tennyson 303).

written in the midsummer of 1857¹, written mostly in the winter of 1857-58 probably finished by the end of the year,² and copied out by 15 March 1858. In July 1858 or just before this,³ Tennyson began Lancelot and Elaine; but because of social distractions and business worries he had little opportunity to devote himself to it until the following winter. It was finished and copied out by the end of February 1859, if not before.⁴ These four Idylls were set up in print as a trial volume entitled The True and the False (subtitled Four Idylls of the King) in March 1859,⁵ and were published as the

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1. Memoir I 419 records that on 9th July the two lines regarding Arthur's farewell to Guinevere the inception of the Idyll, were written.
 2. Memoir I 424 records "The Parting of Arthur and Guinevere" was finished in January 1858. Tennyson 308 states that the whole Idyll was finished by the end of 1857. Memoir 424 and Tennyson 313 state it was "finally completed" on March 15th 1858.
 3. Memoir I 427 dates the inception of Lancelot and Elaine to July 1858 when Tennyson stayed at Little Holland House as a guest of the Prinseps; but Tennyson 313 notes that work on it was under way when Moxon's death on June 3rd caused an interruption. A letter from Thomas Woolner to Emily Tennyson 7 June 58 (quoted later in the text) hopes Tennyson will see fit to tackle such a subject as the 'Maid of Astolat.' Thomas Woolner R.A. (1917) by Amy Woolner, p 149.
 4. Tennyson 315 records: "The new poem was finished and copied out by the end of February 1859", but Emily Tennyson writes to Thomas Woolner 15 Feb 1859: "The Maid of Astolat' is quite finished now, all but last touches..." Thomas Woolner pl63. Clough in a letter to F.J. Child the same day records the completion of the poem. Correspondence of A.H. Clough ed F. Mulhauser (1957) Vol. II, 565.
 5. Tennyson 316. In the 'trial volume' the second Idyll was still called Nimue, though the name of Merlin's seducer in the actual poem was now altered to Vivien.

Idylls of the King¹ in June, and won an immediate popularity.²

Now, though it would seem at a first glance that Tennyson, knowing the Arthurian story as well as he did, would have no difficulty in writing the first four Idylls, and to plan, this is not entirely the case. Merlin and Vivien was written quickly and without difficulty, though the 'Merlin' poem the year before had been abandoned for Maud. Geraint and Enid, though taking a considerable time to compose owing to interruptions such as the decision to occupy and then to purchase Farringford, was also finished without difficulty. As has been indicated already, he had these two poems set up in a 'trial volume' entitled Enid and Nimue, or The True and the False in the summer of 1857, and he had sent copies to close friends. Edmund Lushington was one of these, and his answer in receipt of the volume is interesting.

He wrote:

..... few things can be more certain to me than that these poems, coming out by themselves, would not receive their due of admiration. It would be quite different if they were, as I hope they will be, supported by others of varied matter and interest, giving more completeness and beauty of circular grouping.³

Presumably from the letter Tennyson had proposed publishing the two Idylls by themselves before going on with the work; or the fact that

1. Sir Charles Tennyson considers the title Idylls of the King was substituted for The True and the False because a novel by the Hon. Lena Eden entitled The False and the True had just been published in 1859. Tennyson, 317.
2. This is evident from the fact that there was a second edition the same year, and subsequent editions in 1861, 1862, 1863, 1865, 1868 (and the Gustave Dore illustrated edition the same year), 1869 (two editions), and 1870.
3. Tennyson and His Friends (1911) by Hallam Tennyson, 95.

they appeared together in print made Lushington think they would be so issued. Certainly the title implied that they would be published by themselves. Lushington's criticisms always had great weight with the poet,¹ and perhaps he was influenced to continue with more before he published. He took up the work with Guinevere, which was written smoothly though he interrupted it to write the minor poem Sea Dreams, which disconcerted his learned friend Jowett not a little.² But Lancelot and Elaine gave the poet some trouble, in considering the theme if not the actual execution of it once the story was taken up, as correspondence of the time shows.

As we have seen, there is a difficulty in dating the inception of Lancelot and Elaine, but even if it was begun by June, the following correspondence is revealing. Tennyson's sculptor and poet friend Thomas

1. Tennyson's description of his friend printed in the Epilogue to In Memoriam shows this:

And thou art worthy; full of power;
As gentle, liberal-minded, great,
Consistent; wearing all that weight
Of learning lightly, like a flower. CXXXI.

2. Jowett states in a letter of 12th Dec. 1858: "I hope Mr. Tennyson is well and has good success in his great work... I do not doubt that the world will be charmed with the "Arthur" Idylls....I have more hesitation (shall I go on?) about the other poem respecting the clerk and wife (Sea Dreams), and could wish that the fortunes of it were tried alone as as not to interfere with the good-will towards "Arthur." Memoir I, 434-5. From what Jowett says we may infer that Tennyson wished to publish the first Idylls as part of another volume containing pieces such as Sea Dreams. If this inference is correct, it would help to prove that the first Idylls were first conceived as separate stories, and Tennyson wanted to give the impression that no continuous work was envisaged at this stage.

Woolner, in writing to Emily Tennyson on 7th June 1858 had asked:-

I most earnestly wish you would persuade him to do the Maid of Astolat, not only for the extreme beauty of the subject, but for the sake of introducing much of Sir Lancelot, he being a character of such terrible importance to the "Guenevere" poem, and the immense suggestions arising from the poor lady's death.¹

Woolner would not have put forward his suggestion gratuitously. He must have been asked or consulted, or the Elaine theme, already succinctly expressed as the 'Maid of Astolat,' must already have been suggested in Emily Tennyson's previous letter, or discussed by Tennyson and Woolner earlier. Six months later, on the 15th February 1859, Emily answers another letter of Woolner's and notes:-

The 'Maid of Astolat' is quite finished now, all but the last touches, I do not think you will find her all unworthy of your ideal.²

If it was Woolner's 'ideal,' it may well have been his suggestion in the first place (Tennyson accepted Woolner's suggestions for other poems later, two of which became Enoch Arden and Aylmer's Field),³ but with such fragments of correspondence with which to judge we cannot say anything with certainty. What does emerge clearly is the curiously haphazard way Tennyson set about the work. Friends were continually taken into confidence, and though their good opinions were vital to the poet, their advice was not necessarily a good thing. Certainly it would not help to make the work a unity.

1. Thomas Woolner R.A., Sculptor and Poet (1917) by Amy Woolner, 149

2. ibid., 163.

3. Memoir II,

Another indication of interests independent of the organic evolution of the poem came when the four Idylls were written. Then Tennyson's friends urged him to publish them immediately.¹ The fact that the poet needed to be urged to publish now, suggests that he wanted to withhold them until he had completed his Arthurian plan, or at least had completed such parts of it as would establish the whole. Withholding earlier Idylls until later ones were written would have enabled him to make alterations without embarrassment. But the friends, and possibly the need for money to tide him over his extending commitments, decided the day, and he published.

In spite of the somewhat damaging evidence so far put forward that the treatment of the first Idylls was haphazard, there are various things which show that the four Idylls were part of a greater though at this stage very loosely related scheme. The poet was considering the themes of 'Pelleas and Ettare' and 'King Arthur's Visit to La Beale Isoude' as possible topics for new Idylls during this same publication month of June 1859,² and in the winter of 1860-61 he made a tentative start to what was later to become the Idyll of Gareth and Lynette.³ This all points to the intention to augment the four already written, though it

1. Memoir I. 425
2. Memoir I, 438 and Tennyson 318. No other details are given.
3. Memoir I, 471 (which records merely a reading of the old story), and Tennyson 330, which states that "he made some headway - though he did not carry it far."

is apparent that there was no rigid scheme at this time, as 'King Arthur's Visit to La Beale Isoude' was never treated in any form. Nor was the plan at this stage entirely epic in scope, or rather, was not as extensive as it was later. This is because Tennyson did not at this time consider he could work in the Grail episode, although for years he had recognised that it was the central theme of the Arthurian story.¹ Also he had thought he could not surpass the ending of Guinevere as a close to the Idylls, and he made it the end of the episodic treatment so far envisaged. These decisions are considered next. Yet there can be no doubt that the scheme was a considerable one, as all the evidence for the year 1833 on points. It is difficult to find and present internal evidence for the size and scope of the scheme when it was only partly carried out, when in fact it was conceived episodically and continued to be executed episodically, with the exception of the last few Idylls. But in Guinevere the Idyll is not concerned merely with the guilty queen's parting from Arthur. The king's own mystic origins are related,² hinting that he is not of earthly descent. This origin for Arthur is the one later developed in The Coming of Arthur. Though this does not necessarily prove that Tennyson was thinking of including an Idyll giving

1. Memoir II, 65. Here, speaking of the Grail Idyll after its completion, 18 May, 1869, Lady Tennyson notes in her letter diary "He had the subject on his mind for years, ever since he began to write about Arthur and his knights."

2. Guinevere 283-299

the details of Arthur's coming at this time, it does show that he was seeking to expand the scope of the series so far envisaged, and to round it off with his own inventions, and had formed already in his mind some extended idea of the exalted origins of the king.

Moreover, in 1862 in replying to a suggestion about the Idylls (considered in detail in its place) Tennyson had intimated that he had at some earlier time planned many Idylls:

I have..... arranged all the intervening Idylls (i.e. between Geraint and Enid and Guinevere), but I dare not set to work for fear of a failure, and time lost.¹

I think the best estimate of the position at this stage (1859-62) is to say that with some ideas clearly worked out and with the possibility of others before him, Tennyson wrote one or two episodes to enter into the spirit of legend, and when he had composed these he intended to take stock of the situation and plan additions (as this letter of 1862 shows). Also he knew the Arthurian story could perhaps best be treated episodically, and so a detailed scheme was not required at the outset.

Amongst many friends who suggested on the publication of the Idylls of the King in 1859 that he should 'continue the epic,'² one had something more specific to put forward, namely, that he

1. Memoir I 482-3. In this letter the Duke of Argyll had suggested incorporating the Morte d'Arthur into the scheme of the Idylls.

2. Memoir I, 458.

should tackle the theme of the Grail. This was the Duke of

Argyll, who on 23rd September 1859 wrote:

Meanwhile, how have your Idylls flourished? I found before I left town that Gladstone carried them in his pocket, and I rather think you will be responsible for a spoilt Budget! Beautiful as I thought them at first, I find new beauties every time I read them. By-the-by, Macaulay, when I last saw him, was in great hopes that you would pursue the subject, and particularly mentioned the legend of the Sangreal as one capable of being made much of in your hands, as also the latter days and death of Lancelot. Do give us more, when you can. One's greed is insatiable...¹

On October 3rd Tennyson replied:

As to Macaulay's suggestion of the Sangreal, I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days, without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things. The old writers believed in the Sangreal. Many years ago I did write "Lancelot's Quest of the Grail" in as good verses as I ever wrote, no, I did not write, I made it in my head, and it has now altogether slipped out of memory.²

But the Duke was adamant, and on 20th January 1860 wrote:

....I want you to go on with the larger design and the cycle of subjects on which you must have thought so long and much. In the last letter you wrote to me you said you had, long ago, done what Macaulay had suggested - written on the Sangreal - but had lost what you had written. Do not leave the subject, pray. There are many vacant places yet at your Round Table. Fill them up, do.³

These suggestions Tennyson rapidly dismissed, in an undated letter of 1860:

As to the Sangreal, as I gave up the subject so many long years ago I do not think I shall resume it.⁴

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1. The Duke of Argyll, Autobiography and Memoirs (1906) Vol II, 571.
 2. Memoir I, 456-7.
 3. The Duke of Argyll, Autobiography and Memoirs, II, 572.
 4. Memoir I, 458-9.

However the fact that the treatment of the Grail had now been advocated may have given Tennyson pause for a time in implementing his previous scheme. Ironically it was at this time that he was asked for his opinion on the literary merits of a prose Grail romance.¹ And he knew he had to deal with the Grail episode if he was to make anything more than an inconsequential set of tales from the legend, and he was not ready to deal with it. Moreover the very way he had set about treatment of the legend, in an episodic and idyllic form, made the writing of something so continuous as the Grail story difficult to undertake.

His various uncertainties during this time are recorded from several sources, though unfortunately much useful evidence for three crucial years, those of 1860-62 is lost, because the journals covering this period of his life were mislaid.² Letters from Emily Tennyson to Thomas Woolner give some idea of the difficulties, broken only for a time in the writing of Enoch Arden and Aylmer's Field. Emily Tennyson writes to Woolner on 16th November 1859, obviously alluding to Tennyson's stopping composition of the Idylls:-

I wish you would give Alfred something to do. He is pretty well but for want of this.³

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1. The Seynt Graal, or The Sank Ryal subtitled The History of the Holy Grail ed. F.J. Furnivall (1861, 1863) mentioned previously as a work Tennyson had read.
 2. Memoir I, 467
 3. Thomas Woolner R.A., Sculptor and Poet, p181.

and again, on 7th December 1860:

Beyond all price to me would be a worthy subject for Alfred, one which would fix him whether he would no no.¹

Woolner accordingly suggested stories which Tennyson made into Enoch Arden and Aylmer's Field. Later Emily Tennyson asked his opinion of them, writing to him on 11th July 1864:-

I hope you think he has given your stories well. I wish he would give mine now and do the "Sangreal" for me, but that I heartily adopt "Enoch Arden."²

Yet another suggestion had been made to Tennyson with regard to the Idylls in 1862. Writing in February 1862 in reply to a letter from the Duke of Argyll in which the incorporation of the Morte d'Arthur had been put forward, Tennyson replied:-

As to joining those (the Idylls of 1859) with the "Morte d'Arthur," there are two objections - one that I could scarcely light upon a finer close than that ghostlike passing away of the king (in Guinevere), and the other that the "Morte" is older in style. I have thought about it and arranged all the intervening Idylls, but I dare not set to work for fear of a failure, and time lost.³

Tennyson's whole difficulty was his hesitancy over the Grail story. I think it is mainly the Grail theme he is alluding to (though from the context it is the whole question of new Idylls) when he writes: "I dare not set to work for fear of a failure, and time lost." And once again it was a suggestion from somebody that

1. ibid, 202

2. Thomas Woolner R.A., Sculptor and Poet, 252. Echoed by Lushington in a letter to Tennyson in 1866: "Anything of our own Arthur? That's the true subject." Tennyson and His Friends, 95.

3. Memoir I, 482-3.

set him altering, implementing and expanding his scheme.

Then in a prose Grail romance published in 1864, F.J. Furnivall criticised him for his approach to the Arthurian story he had so far handled.¹ Furnivall's criticism, coming after his adulation previously in an earlier prose Grail romance, would not help Tennyson to resume his Arthurian scheme.

In various other ways these years were difficult for Tennyson, when he was very much in the public eye as laureate and sage. Farringford was too easy of access, so that Aldworth was built later as a retreat from the hordes of tourists who swarmed to the island to see the bard. At this stage he was concerned with the upbringing of his two sons. These and a host of other duties and distractions left him little time to contemplate extensions to his Arthurian project. However two things in particular proved disturbing to him - the theory of evolution, introduced by Darwin in 1859 and the current philosophical trends which challenged religion. An indication of

1. Preface vi-vii of La Queste del Saint Graal (Roxburghe Club, 1864) where Furnivall states that Tennyson's conception of Arthur (in Guinevere) makes him the "Pecksniff of the period." Ruskin earlier had also sounded a note of dissent: "I am not sure but I feel the art and finish in these poems a little more than I like to feel it," in a letter to Tennyson at the beginning of 1860, Memoir I, 453.

In his edition of the Seynt Graal (Vol II, 1863) Furnivall had also criticised Tennyson's interpretation: "There are several versions of the story (of Nimue); but in none is the lady represented as actuated by such abominable motives as Tennyson has ascribed to her in his last and greatest work." Introduction XXV.

the mental impasse he was in is given in the poem

1865-66:-

I stood on a tower in the wet,
And New Year and Old Year met,
And winds were roaring and blowing;
And I said, 'O years, that meet in tears,
Have ye aught that is worth the knowing?
Science enough, and exploring,
Wanderers coming and going,
Matter enough for deploring,
But aught that is worth the knowing?
Seas at my feet were flowing,
Waves on the shingle pouring,
Old Year roaring and blowing,
And New Year blowing and roaring.¹

But there are signs of a change in The Higher Pantheism (1867) and Wages (1868) which show that the poet's view of the materialistic developments in the world was offset considerably by his own spiritual findings and beliefs. Then he was reassured about evolution² when he met Darwin in August 1868, as recorded in Lady Tennyson's journal:-

Aug. 17th. Mr. Darwin called, and seemed to be very kindly, unwordly, and agreeable. A. Said to him, "Your theory of Evolution does not make against Christianity," and Darwin answered, "No, certainly not."³

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1. The poem was first published in Good Words, March 1868. See Memoir II, 62.
 2. "Only in the idea of Evolution, which he had partially apprehended at Cambridge and seen inaccurately foreshadowed in such books as as R.W. Chambers' Vestiges of Creation (1844) could he find any scientific evidence for the existence of a divine purpose guiding the Universe and for the ultimate perfectibility of the human race." Tennyson, 250 - The fullest discussion of Tennyson's lifelong interest in science and evolutionary theories and the evidence of this interest in his poetry, is to be found in Chapter II of Darwin among the Poets (Chicago, 1932) by Lionel Stevenson.
 3. Memoir II, 57.

Perhaps it is not irrelevant to note that not many days later Tennyson had begun writing The Holy Grail.

Then his friendship with the philosopher Benjamin Jowett undoubtedly helped him to overcome the materialistic outlook expressed in Comte's Philosophie Positive¹ and J.S. Mill's System of Logic,² for it led to his renewed interest in metaphysics, particularly those of Immanuel Kant.³ Certainly Kant's approach to spiritual matters, particularly as set out in the second part of the Critique of Judgement,⁴ may have helped Tennyson to subdue the doubts raised in his mind by the materialistic philosophical approach emphasized by Comte and Mill. So much for the spiritual and mental difficulties. But there were technical difficulties as well. One thing which might have helped Tennyson to avoid or reconcile inartistic details and inconsistencies in the original Arthurian chronicles and romances,

1. 1830-1842.

2. 1843.

3. "Tennyson was always very modest about his (own) metaphysical attainments, saying that although he "had a gleam of Kant," he only knew the other great metaphysicians "obiter and obscurely through the talk of others." Tennyson 381.

4. The second part of the Critique of Judgement (the Critique of Teleological Judgement) par. 87. *passim*, which states that if we are to set before ourselves a final end in conformity to the requirements of the moral law, it is necessary for us to assume an Author of the world, or in other words that there is a God. But the conception or absence of a God really cannot be proved by a philosophical (far less by a scientific) reasoning about it; and without such proofs to believe in God we must fall back upon faith.

was his friendship with James (later Sir James) T. Knowles¹ the author of the popular The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table.² This book had been dedicated to Tennyson, who had admired it, and when in 1867 there was an opportunity to meet the two men had become friends. Knowles encouraged Tennyson in his Arthurian plans, as is evident from Lady Tennyson's journal at this time.³ Knowles also later recorded in a letter to a friend, the stimulus he provided Tennyson at the time, and the use to which Tennyson put his book:-

When I came to know him personally (he) talked very frequently about it and Arthur with me, and made constant use of it when he at length yielded to my perpetual urgency and took up again his forsaken project of treating the whole subject of King Arthur... He often used to say that it was entirely my doing that he revived his old plan, and added, 'I know more about Arthur than any other man in England, and I think you know next most.'⁴

Allowing for the self-congratulatory tone of much of this letter, it is still evident that Knowles must have provided a stimulus to Tennyson's Arthurian project just at a time when it was needed.

1. 1831-1908; knighted 1903.
2. 1861 (dated 1862). It went through no less than eight editions by 1895.
3. Noted in her letter-diary for 11th November 1871, Memoir II, 110. "Mr. Knowles's active nature, I think, sometimes spurs A. on to work when he is flagging."
4. In the preface to the 9th edition of The Legends of King Arthur (1912).

Undoubtedly Knowles's own intimate knowledge of the legends and his discussions with the laureate proved helpful to Tennyson in solving a few inconsistencies or disputed points in the Arthurian originals. Knowles claiming to follow Tennyson's own example in the first four Idylls, had been careful in bowdlerising Malory and others not to include any matter that would be unpalatable to the Victorian audience for which he was writing.¹ Such evidence of Tennyson's use of Knowles' version is noted later in the discussions of the sources of the separate Idylls.

In March 1868 Tennyson had apparently formed the prose plan for the all-important Grail Idyll,² and he composed its opening in April.³ But there were interruptions due to his difficulties with the new manager of his publisher (Moxon) which led eventually to his leaving the firm, and also Aldworth, his new house, was being built and required his constant supervision. He resumed the Idyll on 5th September.⁴ Ten days later the first draft of the poem

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1. Knowles was led to bowdlerise the Arthurian story in the first place from Tennyson's example in the first four Idylls of the King: "He has endeavoured, nevertheless, at however great a distance, to follow the rule laid down in the "Idylls of the King," and has suppressed and modified where changed manners and morals have made it absolutely necessary to do so for the preservation of a lofty original idea." Preface to The Story of King Arthur, 1861.
 2. Tennyson 375. The Memoir has nothing to account for the months January to April of 1868.
 3. Tennyson 376, and deduced from the fact that mention is made in the Idyll by Ambrosius of the yew tree pollen seeming like a "smoke." Yew pollen is evident only in April.
 4. Tennyson 378. Not recorded in the Memoir, though extracts from Emily Tennyson's letter-diary record that it was under way on September 9th and 11th, and that it was almost complete on the 14th. Memoir II.57.

was finished, and by the 23rd he read it aloud.¹

Now that the most important Idyll from the point of his epic scheme was composed, it became necessary to compose other Idylls to support and explain it and to put it into artistic perspective. That is, Idylls had to be written leading up to the knights setting out on the Quest; and others to show the decline in the kingdom between the Quest and the discovery of Guinevere's infidelity. If we are to decide at which time the scheme really became epic, or what modified epic scheme remained from the earlier epic plans, it would be when Tennyson set about and then completed successfully the Idyll of The Holy Grail.

Tennyson knew the difficulties of adapting his previous plan to contain The Holy Grail. No preparation had been made for it in earlier Idylls, nor could he alter radically those Idylls. It meant careful fitting, and always with the realisation that the fits so made were not as they could have been. This is evident in a letter Tennyson wrote to F.T. Palgrave at this time; on 31 Dec. 1868:

The 'Grail' is not likely to be published for a year or two... I shall write three or four more of the 'Idylls,' and link them together as well as I may.²

But first of all Tennyson considered an earlier suggestion,³ which was to incorporate the Morte d'Arthur into the scheme. He did

1. Memoir II, 53, 55, 57 and Tennyson 378.

2. Memoir II, 62.

3. Memoir II, 482-3.

not add to and adapt the Morte however, until he had written The Coming of Arthur,¹ and Idyll which formed the basis for all the others, as it showed King Arthur's origins and his setting up a definite kingdom with set standards of behaviour. This initial Idyll was written deliberately in a simpler earlier style to counterbalance the Morte's "more archaic" form,² and to symbolise the primitiveness of man's origins in the world. The Coming of Arthur was finished either at the end of February 1869 or more probably in May, 1869.³ By the middle of May Tennyson was well

1. In the essay on the 'MSS. of the "Idylls of the King"' in Six Tennyson Essays (1954) p 163 Sir Charles Tennyson asserts that the two Idylls of The Coming of Arthur and the lines additional to the Morte d'Arthur which made it into The Passing of Arthur were written in the same marbled notebook, so they may have been conceived together. Lines intended for the beginning of The Passing of Arthur are cited on p164, one of which speaks of Bedivere saying 'Strike for the King and die: let the King reign!' This eventually was used in the knights' song in the addition made to The Coming of Arthur circa 1872.
2. Memoir I, 133
3. There is a difficulty in dating the completion of The Coming of Arthur. In the Memoir II, 64 Lady Tennyson's journal records: "Before the end of February A. had read me all "The Coming of Arthur" finished, and was reading at night Browning's "Ring and the Book." It is not absolutely clear whether this is meant to indicate the whole Idyll was then thought to be completed, or part of it was completed. On the following page the diary records: "May 7th. A. said 'Leodogran's Dream' to me, just made, giving the drift of the whole poem." Again, it is not definite if this brought it to its complete stage at this time, or was added as an afterthought after the Idyll was considered to be complete, to make the story more convincing and possibly repeat a device already used to tie other Idylls together, that of the dream bringing conviction or insight. The situation is further confused when Sir Charles Tennyson, presumably taking Lady Tennyson's first observation to be a statement of the Idyll's completion, records, Tennyson 381, that "by the end of February 1869, he had finished The Coming of Arthur."

advanced with Pelleas and Ettarre, which may have been planned also in 1868.¹ It was completed that summer.² As previously noted, this episode had been contemplated by Tennyson in June 1859, but it fell into place in the scheme only as a sequel to The Holy Grail, not, as in Malory's cycle, as an early and independent story. I think this alteration in the placing of Pelleas and Ettarre a definite sign that Tennyson knew almost fully what scheme he was working to from then on, not merely what stories he might treat, but what bearing he would give each one of them in respect of the whole.

At some time during the same summer Tennyson added 180 lines to the Morte d'Arthur.³ This addition was made to bridge the time between the King's farewell to the queen in the nunnery (Guinevere), and his disposing of Excalibur in the mere in the original Morte d'Arthur

1. In A Bibliography of Tennyson (1908) Vol I, 197, T.J. Wise states that a trial book of what were named eventually The Coming of Arthur, The Holy Grail, Pelleas and Ettarre and The Passing of Arthur was printed for Tennyson in 1868. This year could not possibly have seen the writing and printing in trial book form of all four Idylls, and though The Holy Grail was sent up for printing in November 1868 (Memoir II, 59), and a trial volume of the four was issued probably the following year (See Six Tennyson Essays, footnote to 153), Wise has clumsily antedated it to substantiate his damaging forgeries of trial volumes of The Last Tournament. See the footnote to the dating of The Last Tournament.
2. Tennyson 381, 382.
3. Tennyson 379, 382. There is no exact indication when the addition was made.

Thus within little more than the space of a year following the composition of The Holy Grail, two more Idylls had been added to implement the scheme, and an earlier Arthurian poem, sole completed part of an earlier epic intention, incorporated into it. These three new Idylls and the older poem adapted to the new scheme, were published under the title The Holy Grail, and Other Poems in December 1869 (dated 1870). Unlike the Idylls of the King however, the volume was not occupied exclusively with Idylls, for the poems Northern Farmer (New Style), The Golden Supper, The Victim, Wages, The Higher Pantheism, and Flower in the Crannied Wall ^{in addition} were also printed with the additional Idylls.

Gareth and Lynette, considered in the winter of 1860-61, was taken up again in October 1869; but again he made no headway with it because of various difficulties. These difficulties are given in a letter to James Knowles written on 5th April 1872:

"'Gareth' is not finished yet. I left him off once altogether, finding him more difficult to deal with than anything excepting perhaps 'Aylmer's Field.' If I were at liberty, which I think I am not, to print the names of the speakers 'Gareth' 'Linette' over the short snip-snap of their talk, and so avoid the perpetual 'said' and its varieties, the work would be much easier. I have made out the plan however, and perhaps some day it will be completed."¹

Then by the end of May 1871 The Last Tournament was completed

1. Memoir II, 113

and sent to the printers.¹ The Idyll of Gareth and Lynette was resumed during the spring of 1872 and was completed that summer,² and Gareth and Lynette and The Last Tournament were published together in the autumn of that year.

With the publication of these two Idylls Tennyson thought that he had completed the scheme of the Idylls, but he later felt that some further introduction to Merlin and Vivien was necessary.³ Accordingly during the latter part of 1872 and the early months of 1873 he composed the last Idyll of Balin and Balan with this purpose in mind.⁴

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1. There are several difficulties in dating the composition of The Last Tournament. Memoir II, 100 prints from Lady Tennyson's Letter Diary 8 November 1870: "At night he repeated some of "The Last Tournament" which he had just written." Whether in fact from this evidence the Idyll was more or less complete, or part of it was complete, it is difficult to say. It seems this was most likely the beginning, as Tennyson 394 speaks of the poet beginning to work on the Idyll at the beginning of 1871, and it being sent to the printers at the beginning of May. It was first published in The Contemporary Review, December 1871.

In his A Bibliography of Tennyson (1908) Vol I p192-193, T.J. Wise lists what he calls a 'trial edition' of The Last Tournament owned by himself ('only a single example is known to exist') struck off for the poet sometime in 1868 (though he gives no evidence to prove 1868 is the date, and fly leaves etc are conveniently missing). It would appear that this is one of Wise's forgeries, conveniently if carelessly antedated. (See the brilliant analysis An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain XIX Century Pamphlets, J. Carter and G. Pollard (1934), particularly pp 315-319). The forgery is all the more damaging as the material Wise used for it was certainly a 'trial volume' of the Idyll, and with Tennyson's own corrections on it. Wise also forged some of the 1871 copies of the 'trial volume' of The Last Tournament. Further forgeries of versions of The Last Tournament by Wise are exposed in The Letters of T.J. Wise to J.H. Wrenn ed. F.E. Ratchford (New York, 1944, p.113).

2. Tennyson 398.
3. Memoir II, 121
4. Memoir II, 319 and Tennyson 402-3, 484. When it was published in Tiresias and Other Poems (1885), it was stated to be "An Introduction to Merlin and Vivien."

Also there were additions to The Coming of Arthur.¹ At the same time a major addition to Merlin and Vivien was made.² This addition was largely from material left over from the Balin and Balan prose sketch which did not find a place in that Idyll. It was incorporated into Merlin and Vivien in an effort to make the two Idylls more consecutive, and to introduce fully the figure of King Mark, who already had played a part in Gareth and Lynette and Balin and Balan. Balin and Balan itself was finished in 1874.³

This, then, marks the completion of the Idylls, though Balin and Balan was not published until 1885 in Tiresias and Other Poems. It is difficult to see why it was withheld so long, and Sir Charles Tennyson thinks this was so in case there were to be further

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1. Memoir II, 117, which records from Tennyson's letter diary, 6 November 1872: "I am trying to write a war song for the knights in the first Idyll." An entry on 10th November 1872 states: "It seems to me all right for the knights going forth to break the heathen. It is early times yet, and many years are to elapse before the more settled time of 'Gareth.' I must say that to me the song rings like a grand music."
 2. Memoir II, 121 and Tennyson 402-3
 3. The whole question of the introduction of King Mark into the Idylls is a complicated one, as is shown in Six Tennyson Essays 169-178. Briefly Tennyson made a distinct story of King Mark, and then, to avoid too strong a narrative thread, he broke the story up over three separate Idylls. See the Appendix to the chapter on Balin and Balan.

additions to the Idylls.¹

There are but two other things to note regarding Tennyson's approach to the Arthurian legends after the completion of the Idylls. He referred again to the legend in the oracular and autobiographical Merlin and the Gleam, written in August 1889 and published in Demeter and Other Poems the same year.² This poem and its implications are considered later. Also, after the publication of the Idylls, as if dissatisfied with his treatment of the Tristram story in that cycle, he had considered "weaving into a great stage drama the legend of 'Tristram of Lyonesse' as he had been obliged to cut it down to suit his treatment of the 'Idylls of the King.'"³

From this survey it is obvious that the actual evolution of the Idylls falls into four distinct stages:

(1) Tennyson composed four Idylls of the King between 1856-59 and published them in 1859. These were four independent stories of events at different times in Arthur's reign. But Tennyson knew the Arthurian story so well that each Idyll was written with a clear idea of its relationship to other events and stories in Arthurian history,

1. "A notable point about the volume (Tiresias and Other Poems) was that it contained in Balan and Balan, Tennyson's last attempt to complete the structure of the Idylls of the King. Even with this new Idyll the structure was not wholly satisfactory, for one vital element was still missing - an adequate treatment of the relations between Arthur and Guinevere. Without this the tragedy lacked what should have been its strongest human appeal. Perhaps it was in the hope of being able to make good this defect that the poet withheld Balin and Balan from publication for ten years, after he had completed it in 1874." Tennyson 484.

2. Tennyson 516

3. Memoir II, 373

chronicle and romance, and its purpose in that relationship. Nothing, however, in these Idylls indicates that Tennyson had as yet reached the idea of a closely related series or cycle, despite biographers' talk¹ of a 'plan' from the beginning, for there was no intention to include the Grail episode, itself the central theme of the earlier romances, in the episodic treatment of parts of the Arthurian legend. Moreover, Guinevere was considered the final Idyll; the Morte d'Arthur was not at this time considered suitable for incorporation. Some fairly extensive treatment of Arthurian story was nevertheless envisaged, and it was possibly to have been epic in scope, but the episodes in it were not closely related, and it was different in intention to the final version of the Idylls of the King.

(ii) Tennyson composed The Holy Grail in September 1868. This was the most important episode in Arthurian story, in fact the one which if treated adequately would make the story epical. In writing the Grail Idyll Tennyson was led later to treat some of the legendary stories to lead up to the quest of the Grail itself, and others to show the decline in the kingdom after the failure of the quest. Writing The Holy Grail also entailed minor alterations in the symbolism of the Idylls already composed. This would be the point

1. Hallam maintained always that the work proceeded on a definite plan from start to finish. Sir Charles Tennyson to a lesser degree vindicates Tennyson's work as planned throughout (See Six Tennyson Essays, 153)

at which the Idylls passed from being more or less independent stories of events in Arthur's reign to a more closely worked story with a crisis and decline, and with opportunities to parallel the whole with that of epic.

(iii) Tennyson saw the need to give limits to the series, that is, to provide a beginning and an end so that the various other stories remaining for treatment could be written with an idea of their most effective place in the whole. Thus he decided to incorporate the Morte d'Arthur, suitably adapted and extended, into the evolving plan. But he first composed The Coming of Arthur. In various ways this provided a suitable basis for the whole work. It was also a valuable means of supplying a greater unity to the work as a whole, by anticipating in it ideas and phrases in later Idylls.

(iv) Tennyson fitted in the other parts of the Arthurian story, by composing as Idylls those stories he had considered suitable previously, but had delayed from writing until he had composed a central unifying incident and a beginning and an end to his series. First there was Pelleas and Ettarre, fitted in as a late story, then Gareth and Lynette, which showed the court in its first innocence, and The Last Tournament (the only Idyll which does not have a substantial basis in the ancient Arthurian stories) as a bridge between Pelleas and Ettarre and Guinevere. Another bridge Idyll, Balin and Balan, was written to lead up to Merlin and Vivien, and at the same time an addition to Merlin and Vivien was made to

make it follow on from Balin and Balan. Then there were a number of minor changes to make the other Idylls consistent with the epic achievement and the exalted conception of Arthur that evolved late in the writing. Finally, along with other minor changes, the Idyll of Enid was split into two parts in the edition of the Idylls published in 1873, and these two parts were renamed The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid in the 1885 edition of the Idylls. There were now twelve Idylls of the King, and whether it was by design or not, the ideal epic complement had been reached.

CHAPTER IV

The Sources of the Idylls of the King

Introduction

The following twelve chapters of this thesis trace the use Tennyson made of chronicles, histories, romances, and modern collections and selections of romances in the Idylls of the King.

I devote a separate chapter to each Idyll, and consider each Idyll in its narrative order and in the final form it attained. Each chapter begins with a brief summary of its Idyll's narrative content. I then trace the sources of the Idyll and the additions to it.¹ Thereafter I record the changes made in the Idyll after its first publication to fit it into the larger plan which, as I have shown in Chapter III, evolved late in the composition of the series.

As we have seen, the whole Arthurian story was very much in Tennyson's mind from 1833 onwards; and, as Sir Charles Tennyson says:

1. See Chapter III, pages 75-77 for a general consideration of Tennyson's reading in Arthurian lore.

"He had read and re-read Mallory (sic), Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon, Nennius and Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh Mabinogion, until there was not an episode of the old myths and lays with which he was not familiar."¹ In the Idylls themselves, he takes Malory as his chief source, following him remarkably closely in incident and in phrase;² but frequently he has recourse to the earlier Arthurian records also for both events and details.

Certain difficulties at once arise when the sources of an Idyll are examined. Tennyson's way of telling the story is seldom straightforward. He may start in the middle, work back to the beginning, then forward again from the middle to the end; or he may start at the beginning, give the end, and then proceed to fill in the rest of the story, to cite only two methods. So as there is considerable variety in the way in which the stories are narrated, and as not one original story remains without some important rearrangement or addition, I have taken Tennyson's narrative order in every case, and have followed the twists and turns of his version. Only in this way, intricate as it sometimes is, can an accurate idea

1. Tennyson, p296

2. The two exceptions are The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid, based on the story of Geraint, Son of Erbin in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh tales entitled Mabinogion (1849).

be given of his borrowings, combinings, reconstructions, rejections, and inventions.

(1)

The Sources of The Coming of Arthur

I begin with a summary of the Idyll:-

Old King Leodogran has but a weak control of Cameliard and is being constantly attacked by neighbouring monarchs. The young and as yet unproved King Arthur comes in response to his appeal, falls in love with his beautiful and only daughter, Guinevere, defeats Leodogran's enemies, fells the encroaching forests, and civilises the whole land. He also defeats the enemies of his own kingdom in a great battle; and only then does he send three knights to ask Leodogran for his daughter's hand. (1-138)

Leodogran, unwilling to marry his daughter to a stranger of doubtful descent, learns from his chamberlain that the truth about Arthur's birth is known only to the magicians Merlin and Bleys, who are unwilling to impart it. He receives, however, from Bedivere, the spokesman among Arthur's three knights, the following strange report:- King Uther, long desirous of possessing Ygerne, wife of Duke Gorlois, fought and killed Gorlois and then forced Ygerne to marry him immediately. But Uther died shortly of grief at having no heir; and on the same stormy night Ygerne gave birth to Arthur. As the kingdom was in unrest, Ygerne had the child smuggled from the castle by a secret postern to Merlin; and he entrusted its rearing to Sir Anton. (139-236)

Leodogran now knows that Arthur's descent is at least royal, though remaining doubtful. While still pondering whether to permit the marriage, the old king is visited by Queen Bellicent, Arthur's childhood playmate. In supposed secrecy (though her son Modred hears some of the story), she tells Leodogran that on the very night Uther died, Merlin and Bleys walked the stormy shore of Tintagel. On the horizon they saw momentarily a fiery ship. Just after this a baby was borne to their feet. Merlin caught up the babe and had it brought up by Sir Anton. (237-423)

This report adds confusion to Leodogran's mind. But he dozes, and dreams of a phantom king victorious over all earthly powers. This phantom is crowned finally in heaven. The dream convinces Leodogran that Arthur is the right person to marry his daughter. Arthur sends Lancelot, his strongest knight and greatest friend, to escort Guinevere to his court. The wedding takes place with great splendour; and as part of the ceremony the knights swear loyalty to their king. The

only alien note is when Roman ambassadors, denied tribute, withdraw in wrath. Arthur and his knights defeat the heathen in twelve great battles. (424-518)

For the groundwork of this Idyll Tennyson has drawn on a few passages and details, in Malory, Book I, such as the story of Arthur's begetting on Ygerne by Uther after he has killed Gorlois; events at the boy's birth; and Arthur's love for Guinevere on the first occasion he sees her.¹ Most of these borrowings are reworked to a greater or less degree; and many that were originally Malory's straight narration of events are put by Tennyson into narrative speeches by one of his characters:- Leodogran, Bedivere, Bellicent, Merlin, Lancelot and Arthur. In Malory on the other hand Arthur and Merlin are the only characters who say much; Leodogran speaks a few words of consent respecting his daughter's marriage; Margawse (Bellicent) has nothing to say at this stage of the story; and Bedivere and Lancelot do not even appear until much later in Malory's Arthurian compilation.² Tennyson, however, has developed all of these persons as distinct characters, so that he could readily introduce conflicting stories of Arthur's origins.

1. The only contemporary who treats the story of Arthur's origins is Thomas Westwood (? - 1888) in The Sword of Kingship (1866), published in the volume The Quest of the Sancgreal (1869). Westwood versifies Malory's story of how Arthur won kingship by drawing a sword from a stone (Book I Chapters V-VII), with a few unskillful additions of his own.
2. Bedivere does not appear in Malory till Book V Chapter V and plays little part till near the end of Morte d'Arthur. Lancelot does not appear directly till Book IV Chapter XVIII.

After I have given Tennyson's borrowings from Malory Book I, and the use he made of other parts of Malory, I shall examine examples of his borrowings from other sources such as Gildas, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Layamon, Welsh legends and bardic traditions about Arthur, and a modern collection and a modern adaptation of Arthurian story. Finally I shall show Tennyson's main additions, as distinct from his borrowings or rehandlings.

Tennyson simplifies Malory's story of Arthur's beginnings from the outset, dropping out irrelevant persons and actions in the interests of artistic unity.¹ My first example of Tennyson's use of Malory is from his account of Leodogran's consulting his aged chamberlain about Arthur's origins:-

(Merlin)... departed and cam to his maister, that was passynge glad of his comynge, and there he tolde, how Arthur and the two kynges had sped at the grete batayll, and how it was ended, and told the names of euery kyng and knyght of worship that was there. And soo Bleyse wrote the bataill word by word as Merlyn told him how it began, and by whome, and in lyke wyse how it was endyd, and who hadde the werre. All the bataills that were done in arthurs dayes, Merlyn dyd hys maister Bleyse do wryte.²

'Sir King, there be but two old men
that know:
And each is twice as old as I; and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever
served
King Uther thro' his magic art; and one
Is Merlin's master (so they call him)
Bleys,
Who taught him magic; but the scholar
ran
Before the master, and so far, that Bley
Laid magic by, and sat him down and
wrote
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-
years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's
birth.' (148-158)

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1. For example, the help given by King Ban and King Bors to Arthur in defeating Leodogran's enemies.
 2. Book I Chapter XVIII. Tennyson may have been thinking also of the famous incident in which Leonardo so excelled his master Verrochio in the painting of an angel's head that the latter took to sculpture.

It will be seen from this that Tennyson rehandles the original material completely. In Malory there is simply a reference to the memorable nature of Arthur's campaigns. Tennyson puts these details into the mouth of Leodogran's chamberlain, for the entirely different purpose of introducing the mystery connected with Arthur's origins. Moreover Tennyson has subordinated Bleys, and made him the mere chronicler of his illustrious pupil.

A second example of Tennyson's rehandling of the story will show how he kept graphic details and wordings but modified much of the barbarous original without injuring the power or import of the tale. It is Bedivere's account to Leodogran of what he has heard about Arthur's begetting and birth:-

....for she was called a
fair lady, and a passyng
wyse.... (I.i)

And Kynge Lott of Lowthean
and of Orkenay thenne
wedded Margawse... (I.ii)
..... that of late tyme afore
hadde ben a knyght of kynge Arthurs
and wedded the sister of Kyng
Arthur. (II.x)

But she was a passyng good
woman, and wold not assente
vnto the kynge. And thenne
she told the duke her husband
and said I suppose we were
sente that I shold be dishonoured
wherfor husband I counceille yow
that we depart from hens sodenly..
Also soone as kyng Uther knewe of
theire departyng soo sodenly he
was wonderly wroth. (I.i)

..... in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that
held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife,
Ygerne:
And daughters had she borne him, - one
whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney,
Bellicent...

'..... but a son she had not
borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love:
But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,
So loathed the bright dishonour of
his love,
That Gorlois and King Uther went to
war:
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.

(Now make you redy said
Merlyn this nyght ye shalle
lye with Igrayne in the castle
of Tyntagayll, and ye shalle
be lyke the duke her
husband...) (I.ii)

(...and so in alle haste
they were maryed in a
mornynge with grete myrthe
and Joye. I.ii)

Thenne within two yeres
(after Arthur's birth)
kyng Uther felle seke of a
grete maladye. I.iii.
(Soon after he died, but
named his son successor)

Thenne when the lady was
delyuerd the kyng commaun-
ded ii knyghtes and ii
ladyes to take the child
bound in a cloth of gold,
and that ye delyuer hym
to what poure man ye
mete at the posterne yate
of the castel...(I.iii)

So the child was delywerd
vnto Merlyn, and so he
bare it forth vnto Syre
Ector.

And so Syr Ectors wyf
nourysshed him with her
owne pappe. (I.iii)

... wherfor ther were many
lordes wroth And saide it was
grete shame vnto them all and the
reame to be ouer gouernyd with a
boye of no hyghe blood bonre...
some of the grete lordes had
indignacioun that Arthur shold
be kyng... thenne stood the
reame in grete ieopardy long
whyle, for euery lord that was
myghty of men maade hym stronge,
and many wende to have ben
kyng.

Then Uther in his wrath and heat
besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about her walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,
And there was none to call to but
himself.

So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her
tears,
And with a shameful swiftness....

.....afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to
rule
After him, lest the realm should go to
wrack.

And that same night, the night of the
new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his
time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as
born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin.....

.....because the lords
Of that fierce day.....

.....surely would have
torn the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton....

..... and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd
him with her own;

..... but now,
This year, when Merlin.....

Brought Arthur forth, and set him
in the hall,
Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir,
your king,"

A hundred voices cried, "Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he,
Or else the child of Anton, and no
king,

Or else baseborn"

(Merlin summons all to London and there the sword set in the anvil appears. Merlin advises Arthur constantly during the difficult first days of his reign)

..... Yet Merlin, thro' his craft,
And while the people clamour'd for a king,
Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war.'
(184—236)

Tennyson's main omission is the magical disguise of Uther as Gorlois for a single night by Merlin's arts, so that Ygerne is tricked. This was omitted, like many other details,¹ as unacceptable to Victorian taste.

The chief modification, as distinct from an omission, is to make Ygerne naturally upset at her husband's sudden death and Uther's lust. In Malory Ygerne is perturbed only until she learns the child she carries is Uther's, whereupon she rejoices and marries her first husband's murderer.

The principal invention of Tennyson is to put the whole story as reworked into the mouth of Bedivere who, as indicated earlier, has no place in Malory until most of it is told. Two other important additions are first, Arthur's birth on New Year's Eve (which ^uinagurates the symbolical year-cycle in the Idylls) and the prematurity of his birth (which is a naturalistic consequence of the circumstances of his conception and birth).

1. Amongst many other omissions are Arthur's love for Lyones (I Ch XVIII), when Borre is begotten, and the king's delight in "Lot's wyf of Orkeney," which resulted in Modred's conception and birth (Book I Chapter XIX).

Nor does Tennyson merely keep to Book I of Malory. From elsewhere in the Morte d'Arthur he takes matter appropriate for his purpose, such as the description of Arthur's sword Excalibur,¹ Arthur's war with Rome,² and numerous archaisms in spellings, phrasings, and words. As will be seen, such scattered borrowing from Malory occurs throughout the Idylls.

For still further departures from his main source Tennyson has recourse to Gildas and other pre-Malory chronicles. The description of the wasting of Leodogran's kingdom by his enemies:-

For many a petty king.....
 Ruled in this isle and, ever waging war
 Each upon other, wasted all the land;
 ... And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
 Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
 And man was less and less, till Arthur came. (5...12)

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
 Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
 And none or few to scare or chase the beast... (20-22)

seems to have been suggested by passages in Gildas and Wace, both of whom include general descriptions of the desolation of Britain. Gildas records the effect of the Pictish onslaught on the Britons after the Romans had left the country:

They left their cities, abandoned the protection of the wall, and dispersed themselves in flight more desperately than before. The enemy, on the other hand, pursued them with more unrelenting cruelty

1. The Coming of Arthur 300-304, based upon details of various swords described in Malory, but particularly that in XIII Ch. II.
2. The Coming of Arthur 503-515, based partly upon Book V.

than before, and butchered our countrymen like sheep, so that their habitations were like those of wild beasts.¹

And in Wace there are many descriptions of the wild nature of Britain.

For example, just before Arthur's reign Bishop Eldad, giving King Aurelius an idea of the land, states:-

Bretaigne qui est longue et lee
Par pluiseurs lius est desertee;
Fair lor an partie livrer,
Si's fair arer et laborer,
Si vivront de lor gaignages...²

From Geoffrey and Layamon may come more specific details. Thus one sign of the anarchy is that:

.....wild dog, and wolf and bear and bear
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallow'd in the gardens of the King. (23-25)

which sounds like an echo from Geoffrey's Historia:

The roaring whelps shall watch, and, leaving the woods, shall hunt within the walls of cities.³

Later, Tennyson's

...And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child... (38-39)

is a little reminiscent of a figure of speech in Layamon's Brut, in an

1. Gildas' chronicle, par. 19. A similar description of British woes during the Pictish and pirate onslaught occurs in par.24. For Tennyson's acknowledging use of Gildas as a source see Works (1913) page 962.

2. Le Roman de Brut par Wace ed. Le Roux de Lincy (Rouen 1836-38), Tome I, 380 (lines 8145-8149). "Britain is a great realm, long and wide, and inhabited of none save the beast, etc.,"

3. Historia Regum Britanniae Book VII Chapter III (The Prophecies of Merlin).

entirely different context:

He turned his steed, and to him gan ride, and smote him through with the spear, as if he were spitted, and drew to him the spear.¹

Other possible borrowings from Layamon's chronicle are to be found later in the Idyll. For example, Leodogran's dream, which convinced him about Arthur's royalty, came when all was:-

Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,
Now looming and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker..... (428-434)

Tennyson here echoes the heavy alliterative stress and the cryptic phrasing which Layamon carried over from Anglo-Saxon poetry. The idea for the dream, however, may have been drawn from Malory.²

Tennyson seems to have taken from Layamon the name Dubric for the bishop who married Arthur and Guinevere, an epic epithet (e.g. Dubric the high saint) or epic label being often added as in Layamon.³ And

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1. Layamon's Brut ed. Madden (1849)⁷ lines 26519-26523. Tennyson quotes passages from the Brut in Works (1913) 962, 979.
 2. In Malory Arthur has several dreams, one of which (Book I Chapter IX) is similar in content to Leodogran's dream. Arthur dreams that griffins and serpents slay all the people, and after being wounded severely by them he manages to slay them. This symbolises his success in war, just as Leodogran's dream gives a symbolic picture of Arthur's reign.
 3. Malory does not name his archbishop; in Geoffrey it is Dubricius, and in Layamon: "He (Aurelius) made two bishops, wondrously good, Saint Dubriz at Kaerleon, and Saint Samson at York; both they became holy, and with God high." (17502-17507). On the three other occasions that Layamon introduces Dubric into his chronicle, the bishop's name has an epic label added.

the knights' singing at the close of Arthur's marriage and coronation together with some details in the song is indebted to the singing of the knights in response to Arthur on two occasions in Layamon's

¹
Brut.

Tennyson draws on various Welsh sources for a few minor details.²
Thus from Welsh legend comes the idea of the ninth wave, on which the infant Arthur is borne to the feet of Merlin in Bellicent's report:

Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged...
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe... (379-382)

Tennyson had apparently come on a passage in Edward Davies' The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids:³

A holy sanctuary there is upon the ninth wave. Holy are its inhabitants, in preserving themselves. They will not associate in the bonds of pollution. It is not their established custom to act with severity.

1. The first occurs after the knights have been victorious over the Scots: "...there sung warriors marvellous songs of Arthur the king... to this world's end.... in ever any realm." (22077-22086). In another fine passage before the fight with the Romans the king inspires his knights, and they answer him in chorus. (27230-27241)
2. Tennyson is careful not to borrow matter that is controversial. Much of the Welsh bardic relics published, translated and interpreted from the beginning of the XIX century became increasing matter for controversy as time went on. The absurdities of their antiquity, translation and interpretation were exposed in Taliesin (1858) by D.W. Nash.
3. 1809, p 509. In its time this was considered a comprehensive account of bardism. It contains liberal quotations (in translation) from ancient Welsh poetry.

Later in the Idyll Merlin sings "in riddling triplets of old time":-

'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.' (402-404)

which follow closely the tribanan of ancient Welsh poetry as explained by Davies:-

Amongst the most curious remains of the old Bards, we may class those metrical sentences, called tribanan or triplets. Each of these is divided into three short verses, which are again united by the final rhymes.

The most singular feature of these versicles is, that the sense of the first two verses has no obvious connection with that of the last. The first line contains some trivial remark, suggested by the state of the air, the season of the year, the accidental meeting of some animal, or the like. To this is frequently subjoined some thing that savours more of reflection; then the third line comes home to the heart, with a weighty moral precept, or a pertinent remark upon men and manners.¹

The last line of Merlin's song:

From the great deep to the great deep he goes. (410)

is borrowed from references to the "great deep" in the Welsh triads² which Tennyson may have found in Edward Williams's translation of them in his Poems Lyric and Pastoral,³ especially the following:-

1. *ibid.*, p.80
2. A form longer and more sententious than the triplet.
3. 1794, Vol II, p241-242. These triads were published sporadically in various books during the century.

Animated Beings have three states of existence: that of Inchoation in the Great Deep (or lowest point of existence); that of liberty in the state of Humanity; and that of love, which is Felicity, in Heaven.

and:-

There are three principal indispensabilities (necessities) before plenitude of knowledge can be obtained: to traverse the Circle of Inchoation; to traverse the Circle of Felicity; and the recovered memory of all things down to the Great Deep.

An observation in the abstract of Merlin given by George Ellis in his Specimens¹ may have been Tennyson's basis for the mystery shrouding Arthur's ancestry, for it says that Arthur:-

.....was kept in perfect ignorance of his high birth, and Uther, though he lived many years after this, expired without revealing the secret either to Arthur or Igera.²

In Malory on the other hand Uther announces on his sick bed that his son Arthur should be king.³ So Tennyson may have exploited the idea of Arthur's mysterious origins given only in Ellis.

Further on in the abstract, Leodogran's own lack of knowledge about Arthur is also noted:-

Leodogran, going in search of Guenevere, presented her to Arthur, telling him that, whatever might be his rank, his merit was sufficient to entitle him to the possession of the heiress of Carmelide..... Merlin then proceeded to satisfy the king respecting the rank of his son-in-law.⁴

1. Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances (1805). See Chapter I page 6 for an account of the collection.

2. Specimens I, 241.

3. Book I Chapter IV.

4. Specimens I, 296.

This detail in the abstract may have suggested to Tennyson the idea of Leodogran making an investigation into Arthur's origins. In Malory, on the other hand, Leodogran had accepted Arthur gladly without question.

Furthermore, a quotation from the metrical romance Ellis provides in his abstract respecting the authority of Arthur, may have been borrowed or echoed by Tennyson. It is when Bishop Brice harangues the people of Cardoile into acceptance of Arthur:-

Ac for he is king, and king's son.¹

In the Idyll Leodogran asks how can he give his daughter to any:-

.....saving to a king,
And a king's son. (142-143)

I note Tennyson's further use of details from Ellis's Specimens where they occur in the Idylls.

Finally, one modification may have been due to a modern prose retelling of Malory by Tennyson's friend James T. Knowles's² The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table.³ It is the

1. ibid., I p248. The use of this quotation is pointed out by W. Wullenweber in his otherwise methodically useless study, "Ueber Tennyson's Königsidylle 'The Coming of Arthur,'" published in Herrig's Archivarius lxxxiii (1889).
2. Later Sir James T. Knowles. He built Aldworth for Tennyson.
3. 1862, but actually published late in 1861. In subsequent editions it was revised for style and renamed The Legends of King Arthur.

omission in deference to Victorian taste of the magical disguise of Uther as Gorlois in order to seduce Ygerne.¹

From Tennyson's debts to his predecessors from Gildas and Nennius downwards I should like to pass on to what may be justifiably called his inventions or additions. The most ingenious and pervasive of them might be taken to be the throwing of the various accounts of Arthur's origins into narrative speeches by persons in the Idyll. But this is, strictly speaking, a poetic device rather than an invented addition to the story. On the other hand the following lines contain an undoubted invention:-

And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard; the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom. (319-324)

They occur when Bellicent dismisses her sons before she gives her version of Arthur's origin to Leodogran. And by them Tennyson not only introduces Gareth and Modred thus early in his cycle (neither of these knights has any prominence until much later in Malory) but also indicates the high-spiritedness of the one and the deceit of the other in anticipation of disastrous consequences later.

But a more important invention by Tennyson is his spiritualising of his hero. Arthurian tradition had not made Arthur a royal saint, however heroic and noble he might be in the romances and chronicles.

1. The Story of King Arthur pages 13-14. The details of the magical disguise are also omitted in Holinshed's Chronicles (edition of 1816) Book V Chapter V and in Carew's Survey of Cornwall.

Tennyson had a concept of the saintly Arthur, endowed with more-than-human virtue and with something of supernatural power, from the outset. Witness the end of the Morte d'Arthur, Merlin and Vivien and the three other Idylls written first develop the ideal portrait; and then in the passage in The Coming of Arthur which stands now as the first of the series, Tennyson's final conception of Arthur is appropriately put into the mouth of Bellicent, Arthur's own sister and so likely to know the truth. According to her, on the night of Uther's death Merlin and Bleys leave Tintagel:-

.....thro' the dismal night - a night
 In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost -
 Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
 It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
 A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
 Bright with a shining people on the decks,
 And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
 Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
 Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
 Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
 And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
 Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:1
 And down the wave and in the flame was borne
 A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
 Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried, "The King!
 Here is an heir for Uther!"

(370-385)

-
1. Tennyson may be recording his observation of the sea's phosphorescence; but in Richard Carew's Survey of Cornwall (edition of 1811, p87) phosphorescence is associated with storm off the Cornish coasts:- ".....somewhat before a tempest, if the sea-water be flashed with a stick or oar, the same casteth a bright shining colour, and the drops thereof resemble sparkles of fire, as if the waves were turned into flames, which the sailors term briny."

The dream of Leodogran after hearing Bellicent's story and the conviction it brings to him of her credibility are likewise Tennysonian inventions. And so perhaps we should regard the tragic irony of Arthur's sending Lancelot to conduct Guinevere to Camelot:-

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen; - and watch'd him from the gates:
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and return'd
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere. (446-451)

To sum up, Tennyson has drawn on Malory for the account of Arthur's conception and birth. But the material taken is refined to remove distasteful details, and the account as reworked is put into the mouth of Bedivere. Its effect is to make the story deliberately more confusing. And another account of greater authenticity is given by Bellicent, a character who in Malory says nothing at all and who does little at this stage. This second account contributes more to the concept of the saintly and superhuman Arthur. Another character from Malory who is much developed by Tennyson is Leodogran. He plays little part in Malory; but in The Coming of Arthur he is the pivot of the Idyll, so to speak, in that it is he to whom all the conflicting stories about Arthur are told and who has to take a major decision in their wake.

Gildas and Nennius are drawn on for pictures of the times in the 5th century when the Arthur of history is supposed to have lived. Such later accounts as those of Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon are also used when they seem to refer to a historical rather than to an imaginary Arthur. Archaisms from many of these sources are skilfully

introduced into the Idyll to give an antique tone; and Welsh legend and bardic tradition are used to colour Tennyson's invention of Arthur's coming with more of the marvellous and mysterious. Finally, as the Idyll was written comparatively late in the series as the basis for all the others, a greater unity to the work as a whole is supplied by anticipating in it ideas and phrases in later Idylls.

(ii)

Changes and Additions to The Coming of Arthur on its republication

Tennyson was in the habit of improving his poems in subsequent editions, mainly by phrasal and metrical changes, but sometimes more substantially. Of course he made more changes in the Idylls of early publication than in those of more definite aim and purpose composed later. Though The Coming of Arthur was written late in the cycle, he made several additions to it¹ because of the important part events in this initial Idyll play throughout the series. The alterations to it are negligible.²

1. For the dates of these additions and alterations see Chapter III p 99.
2. The only significant alteration is the substitution of the name Urien for Rience in line 36. Rience was a king of North Wales in Malory, whose hobby was making a mantle from the beards of defeated kings. He demanded Arthur's beard also. Urien was king Arthur's brother-in-law, and one of the kings who war against him (Book I Chapter Xff), and the substitution is thus an improvement, to show that not only was king against king, but brother against brother. D.W. Nash's Taliesin (1858) otherwise sharply critical of ancient Welsh poetry and traditions, asserts the historicity of Urien Rheged in bardic relics, and this may have influenced Tennyson in his substitution.

The chief additions consist of passages descriptive of the king's powers in battle;¹ Lancelot's oath of loyalty on the battlefield;² details added to Arthur's marriage to Guinevere and their coronation;³ and the war-song of the knights, in which they swear loyalty to the king.⁴ All but one of these additions serve to emphasize the binding validity of the vows sworn to Arthur, so that dereliction from his ideals appears the greater when it appears later in the Idylls descriptive of the progress of his reign.

However the first addition of all is very different. It illustrates Arthur's superhuman powers before his first important battle when:-

..... the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star. (95-99)

Then, during the battle, Arthur is aided by divine intervention:-

..... but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him
And dazed all eyes.... (106-108)

By such touches does Tennyson build his picture of the spiritual king, "the mirrour of manhood, and Champion of Cheval^Rie."

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1. The Coming of Arthur 94-123.
 2. The Coming of Arthur 124-133.
 3. The Coming of Arthur 459 - 469; 475-480
 4. The Coming of Arthur 481-501.

CHAPTER V

(i)

The Sources of Gareth and Lynette

The Idyll is based upon the events in the first and most artistic half of the story of Beaumayns (Sir Gareth) in Malory Book VII.¹ Tennyson follows the story quite closely in showing, for instance, how Gareth claims the quest; how he is scorned continually by Lynette; and how he conquers many knights. He also reworks a few details from the remainder of the story of Beaumayns into the Idyll. I first indicate Tennyson's borrowings from Malory's story of Beaumayns and then his borrowings from elsewhere in Malory, to show how the significant events and vivid dialogue are worked in artistically; and then I trace his important alterations.

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1. Book VII Chapters I-XVIII. The remaining chapters of the book involve Gareth in sundry incredible battles, from which he always emerges victorious, and show Lynette to be an enchantress, who uses spells to prevent Gareth and Lyonors anticipating their marriage. E.C. Brewer points out with many mistakes and inaccuracies in Notes and Queries 5th Series Vol IX (1878) P41, 122, 201, and Vol XI (1879), p101 Tennyson's borrowings and departures from Malory.

Finally I consider his two chief inventions, which occur at the beginning of the Idyll; the play of wits between Gareth and his mother, and the elaborate description of Camelot.

The story in the Idyll is as follows:-

Gareth, the youngest child of King Lot and Queen Bellicent, desires to become one of Arthur's knights, like his brothers Gawain and Modred, but he must remain at home. Eventually his mother, hoping he will soon tire of hard work and return home, permits him to go to Camelot if he works as a scullion for a year and a day. The mystical city entrances him, and there he enters service in the kitchens, which are supervised by Sir Kay. (1-514)

Soon Bellicent pities her son, and releases him from service. Then the damsel Lynette comes to Camelot, seeking Lancelot to vanquish a recreant who is besieging her sister, Lyonors. Gareth rashly asks permission to undertake this quest. Arthur consents reluctantly, but sends Lancelot to shadow the young unproven knight. Kay, angry at his scullion's knighthood, gives chase but is easily unhorsed. Gareth then encounters a nobleman set upon by six men, and he fells three, and the rest flee. Then he spends the night at the noble's castle; but Lynette will not sit at table with him, berating him as a common churl. (515-882)

The next day Gareth fights in turn the knights Morning Star, Noonday Sun, and Evening (brothers calling themselves The Day). During this time Lynette's scorn has changed gradually to admiration. Then Lancelot encounters Gareth and challenges him, because of Kay's discomfiture; and the young knight is unhorsed easily. Lancelot now educates Gareth for his final encounter against an opponent known only as Night or Death. Surprisingly Death is quickly overthrown, and from his smashed helm appears the face of a young boy. So Lyonors is saved, and Gareth marries Lynette. (883-1394)

For my first example I have taken the occasion when Lynette first scorns Gareth for daring to undertake her quest:-

.....anone she sayd what dost
thow here, thou stynkest al of
the kechyn, thy clothes been
bawdy of the greece and talowe
that thou gaynest in kyng Arthur's
kechyn.

.....ryghte soo cam
syre kay and sayd
Beaumayns what syre
knowe ye not me....

ye sayd beaumayns I
knowe yow for an vngentyl
knyghte of the courte.¹

.....'Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of
kitchen-grease
And look who comes behind', for
there was Kay.
'Knowest thou not me? they master?
I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth.' And
Gareth to him
'Master no more! too well I know
thee, ay-
The most ungentle knight in
Arthur's hall.' (732-738)

Here Tennyson's transposition of dramatic material from two of
Malory's chapters can be seen, to climax Lynette's invective with
the introduction of Sir Kay.

A second example, Lynette's continuing scorn, shows Tennyson's
close following of Malory's dialogue. Gareth has just unhorsed Kay:-

What arte thou but a luske
and a torner of broches
and a ladyl weasher.

Damoysel sayd Beaumayns
saye to me what ye
wylle, I wylle not goo
from you what someuer
ye say, for I haue vndertaken
to kyng Arthur for to acheue
your aduenture, and so shal I
fynyshe it to the ende,
eyther I shall dye therefore.

'Thou hast overthrown and slain thy
master - thou!
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!
- to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as
before.'
'Damsel,' Sir Gareth answer'd gently,
'say
Whate'er ye will, but whatso'er ye
say,
I leave not till I finish this fair
quest,
Or die therefore.'

1. Book VII Chapters IV and V.

Fy on the kechyn knaue
wolt thou fynyshe myn
aduenture, thou shalt
anone be met with al,
that thou wouldest not
for alle the brothe
that euer thou soupest
ones loke hym in the face.¹

'Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he
talks'
The listening rogue hath caught the manner
of it.
But knave, anon thou shalt be met with,
knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the
face' (750-762)

The third example of Tennyson's use of Malory is the most difficult to give satisfactorily, for in building Gareth's combats with Morning Star, Noonday Sun, Evening Star, and Death, Tennyson had drawn upon no less than eight consecutive encounters Gareth has with knights in Malory. I select, as an example of this kind of borrowing and reworking, Gareth's encounter with Morning Star. Out of malice towards Gareth, and in order to provoke his blue-armoured opponent, Lynette utters the following warning:-

'See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd: he is not knight but knave.' (899-900)

However Morning Star scorns to fight a mere kitchen-boy:-

'A kitchen knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.' (930-933)

This rejoinder incenses Gareth. He replies:-

'Dog, thou liest.
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.' (936-937)

1. Book VII Chapter V.

Then they fight on the bridge over the river. In the combat Gareth's shield is cloven in two, but he forces his adversary into submission.

Amongst the eight encounters Gareth has in Malory, he conquers a second (and at that time unnamed) Knight at a ford. Lynette, however, considers he has won by treachery:-

by myshap thou camyst behynde hym and myshappely thou slewe hym.¹

When thirdly he encounters the Knight of the Black Land, the latter disdains to fight with a mere boy:-

I shalle putte hym doune vpon one foote, and his hors and his harneys he shal leue with me, for it were shame to me to doo hym ony more harm.

Gareth, however, replies:-

I am gentyl man borne and of more hyghe lygnage than thou.²

When in hisfourth combat Beaumayns fights a green knight his shield is broken:-

....he gaf a grete stroke of myghte and clafe his shelde thorou. whan Beaumayns sawe his shelde clouen a sonder, he was a lytel ashamed....³

In addition many of Malory's knights are identifiable only by the colour of their armour; and the sixth knight encountered is Sir Persant of Inde, and Inde is a dark blue or indigo colour.⁴ Thus

1. Chapter VI.
2. Chapter VII.
3. Chapter VIII.
4. Chapter XI.

in his portrayal of Morning Star Tennyson has drawn on no less than four of the eight different encounters Gareth has with knights in the original.¹

It is amazing how Tennyson rehandles a story that is "all strung together without art," reworking and simplifying the superfluity of combats and miscellaneous confusingly identified knights with the greatest economy, so that little of the colour and feeling in the original story of Beaumayns is lost.

Tennyson also borrows details from the chapters of Malory he omitted from his narrative, such as the emphasis on Gareth's gentleness,² and he borrows from elsewhere in Malory when he portrays as part of the picture Gareth gets of the court, the king's dispensing justice (310-430). Most of these judgments are, in fact, Tennyson's own illustrative inventions, but one is borrowed from a detail very early in Malory:-

Then came a widow crying to the King,
 'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
 From my dead lord a field with violence:
 For howso'er at first he proffer'd gold,
 Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
 We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
 Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'
 Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye? gold or field?'
 To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,
 The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.'
 And Arthur, 'Have thy pleasant field again,
 And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
 According to the years. No boon is here,
 But justice, so thy say be proven true.
 Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
 Would shape himself a right!' (326-341)

1. In portraying the three remaining knights in the Idyll, Tennyson does not necessarily take his material consecutively. For example, in the description of the last knight, Death, Tennyson draws on (iii), (vi) and (viii).

2. Stressed in Book VII Chapter XX.

This incident is based upon the early passage in Malory:-

And many complayntes were made vnto sir Arthur of grete wronges that were done syn the dethe of kyng Uther, of many londes that were bereued lordes, knyghtes, ladyes and gentilmen, wherfor kyng Arthur maade the londes to be yeuen ageyn vnto them that oughte hem.¹

What seems a striking borrowing of a situation, though in fact all the developments in it are entirely Tennyson's own, is his opening to the Idyll, where the youthful Gareth languishes in his mother's castle, eager only to leave and prove himself a knight. In Malory, on the other hand, the story starts when Beaumayns appears at court, and much later in the story we learn that he had divested himself of the horse and armour his mother had given him, in order to prove himself without advantage. But the opening to the story of "Peredur the Son of Evrawc" in the Mabinogion pictures a youth in a situation very similar to that of Gareth in the Idyll:-

Now the name of the seventh son was Peredur, and he was the youngest of them. And he was not of an age to go to wars and encounters, otherwise he might have been slain as well as his fathers and brothers. His mother was a scheming and thoughtful woman, and she was very solicitous concerning this her only son and his possessions. So she took counsel with herself to leave the inhabited country, and to flee to the deserts and unfrequented wildernesses. And she permitted none to bear her company thither but women and boys, and spiritless men, who were both unaccustomed and unequal to war and fighting. And none dared to bring either horses or arms where her son was, lest he should set his mind upon them.²

Later however, Peredur meets some knights, and though his mother attempts to mislead him he leaves her for the service of chivalry.

1. Book I Chapter V.
2. Mabinogion Vol I 297-298.

Tennyson certainly must have known this story, because he shows a full acquaintance not only with the story of Geraint (treated in the next chapter), but also with notes and allusions to be found throughout the Welsh collection. Certainly the alteration he struck out of Bellicent's reluctance to allow her remaining son to go to Camelot, and the series of subterfuges she adopts to dissuade him from going, may have been based upon or recollected from this tale of Peredur.

Now that the borrowings have been considered, I wish to review Tennyson's main alterations. First of all in the Morte d'Arthur Gareth fights Lancelot before setting out on the quest, and the great knight is glad to call a halt.¹ In Tennyson's rehandling he introduces the episode after Gareth has fought and defeated Morning Star, Noonday Sun and Evening Star. Then Gareth is unhorsed easily by Lancelot. Obviously the relocation of this incident has been to avoid an anti-climax too early in the story; and the outcome of it has been altered so that Lancelot appears omnipotent, and Gareth at first over-confident, then genuinely humble. Moreover in a characteristic addition to the incident Tennyson makes Lancelot undertake Gareth's education for the last and most difficult encounter:-

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. (1313-1318)

1. "In goddes name sayd syr launcelot, for I promyse you by the feythe of my body I had as moche to doo as I myghte to saue my self fro you vnshamed, and therfore ye no doubte of none earthly knyghte." Book VII Chapter V.

A minor change, noteworthy as a way of modernising the original, is the time Gareth must serve his apprenticeship in the king's kitchens. In Malory Gareth at his own request serves for a year and a day; but in the Idyll his mother stipulates a year and a day,¹ but later reduces this to two months.²

Tennyson also changes the conclusion to the tale. To end the Idyll Gareth marries the scornful Lynette; but in Malory the tale's ending is more realistic, for Gareth marries the lady on whose behalf he has fought so often, Lyonors, and it is his brother Gaheris (one of many important knights omitted for the sake of simplicity in the Idylls) who marries Lynette.

Tennyson's invention takes up some four hundred lines at the beginning of the Idyll, and I note its essentials. Though the Idyll's setting, as we have seen, seems a borrowing from "Peredur the Son of Evrawc," the interplay of wit between the mother and son is invented. I give, as an example of this, Bellicent's mixture of flattery, bribery, and self-pity when she attempts to keep her son at home:-

'Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where they father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a dog, and all but smoulder'd out!
...And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall...
Stay therefore thou.... the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang,
Of wrench'd or broken limb - an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;...

1. Gareth and Lynette 154.

2. Gareth and Lynette 515-520.

Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
 Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
 Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year...
 Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man.' (72...97)

But after many telling points have been made on both sides, Bellicent agrees to his becoming a knight, provided he works for a year and a day in the king's kitchens.

Then parts of Camelot vanish and reappear as in a mirage as Gareth approaches it, and this continual evanescence prepares him for the closer description of the city. It is heavy with carven figures and elusive allegories:-

New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
 Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
 Were giddy gazing there.... (222-224)

An aged man (Merlin)¹ accosts Gareth at the city gates and tells him Camelot was built and continues to be built by supernatural means. In telling him this the sage describes Arthur's vows:-

..... the King
 Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which
 No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
 Without, among the cattle of the field. (265-270)

He continues in Platonic vein:-

For an ye heard a music, like enow
 They are building still, seeing the city is built
 To music, therefore never built at all,
 And therefore built for ever. (271-274)₂

1. For this identification see Works (1913), 965.
2. Compare, for example, the allegories Plato employs to illustrate the nature of the body and the soul in the Phaedo.

Gareth then enters the court, and sees the king dispensing justice. Amongst many circumstances invented to display the king's justice one is noteworthy. It is when Mark, king of Cornwall, sends a present of a cloth of gold to King Arthur along with the request to be made a member of the Round Table. This invention is rounded off with Arthur's rejection of the gift, the reason given being borrowed from Malory:-¹

'.....Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl.
..... a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings, -
Accursed, who strikes not let the hand be seen.' (418...427)

After this incident the story of Beaumayns in Malory Book VII is taken up.

Thus Tennyson has drawn on the first and most artistic half of Malory's Book VII, the story of Beaumayns, and he has borrowed occasionally from the second half of the story. He borrows perhaps for the setting of his narrative from the opening situation in the story of Peredur in the Mabinogion, but the interplay of character between mother and son and the detailed description of Camelot are his own; and his invented ending, though a convenient alteration so that no new characters need to be introduced, is far less likely than the ending to the story in Malory.

1. Examples of Mark's plots and treacherous counsels are the letters sent to Arthur, Book X Chapters XXVI-XXVII; Mark ambushes Tristram in Book VIII Chapter XIII; he craftily sends spies to Camelot, Book X Chapter VII; and he strikes unseen when he wounds Uwaine from behind, Book IX Chapter XXXVII.

CHAPTER VI

(1)

The Sources of The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid

This Idyll, though it was divided eventually because of its length,¹ was conceived and written as one work. Therefore in this first section on sources I treat it as a single work, though the indication of line numbers is according to its division in the final scheme of the Idylls.² In the section following, in which I note the various changes made to the work subsequent to its first publication, the steps taken until the Idyll became two separate works will be indicated.

The Idyll begins:-

Geraint, married to the beautiful Enid, hears scandal spoken of Guinevere and Lancelot; and as Guinevere's closest friend is Enid, she too comes under suspicion. Leaving court by pretence, Geraint returns home with Enid. (1-68)

1. See Chapter III, 103.

2. To indicate the line numbers in The Marriage of Geraint the contraction MG is employed, and GE for Geraint and Enid.

Not long after through an unfortunate mistake Geraint believes his wife unfaithful, so he forces her to accompany him into the wilderness clad in her meanest dress. Now this particular dress is the one she wears when first Geraint meets her. The story runs as follows:- A hunt is declared at Caerleon. Guinevere and Geraint rise too late to participate and as they seek the hunters they are treated rudely by an unknown passing knight. Geraint trails this knight to his own territory, and stays overnight at Earl Yniol's dwelling. (69-324)

The next day Geraint, admitted into the annual tournament of love because he has fallen in love with Yniol's daughter, Enid, defeats the haughty knight, whose name is Edryn. Geraint sends Edryn to Caerleon to beg forgiveness of Guinevere. Enid, wishing to wear a fine dress for her journey to court, must travel in her mean one, for Geraint wants Guinevere to clothe his bride in her bridals. They are wedded, but the dress of faded silk is preserved as a memento of their first meeting. (325-849)

In its original form the Idyll continues:-

Now at her husband's command, Enid wears the mean dress again for the journey into the wilderness, and she is not allowed to speak to him. After Geraint defeats various groups of men they encounter the dissolute Limours, Enid's former lover. He plans to take her from Geraint, and Enid nominally consents; but during the night she warns Geraint. They leave the region and when Limours realises he has been tricked, he gives chase. Geraint puts him to flight, but is wounded. (1-435)

Soon Geraint swoons by the roadside; and the bandit Doorm comes past. He takes up Geraint, largely because he finds Enid attractive, and so they go to his hall. He tries to force Enid to share the feast, and strikes her when she will not. Geraint, quietly recovered from his swoon, rises and cuts off Doorm's head. Doorm's followers flee, and Geraint and Enid set off homewards. (436-761)

As they leave the bandit hold they are accosted by a knight. Enid pleads her husband's sickness, and the knight reveals himself as none other than Edryn, on a quest for the king. He is utterly changed by his residence at court. Soon Geraint is well, becomes once more a model of chivalry, has children, and is killed eventually fighting for Arthur against the heathen. (762-969)

The outlines of this tale are taken from the story of Geraint ap

Erbyn in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh Mabinogion (1849),¹ and first I would like to indicate generally the extent and kind of Tennyson's borrowing. Then there are a number of important alterations Tennyson has made to the original story for the sake of narrative or didactic effect, and I trace the most significant of these.²

Tennyson follows the narrative of the Welsh tale fairly closely to begin with, for example in following the hunt for the white hart; Guinevere's encounter with the strange knight; Geraint's journey to the knight's territory; his love for Enid; and his fighting and overcoming the knight in the annual tournament. Also Tennyson seldom passes a pictorial phrase or description without incorporating it into the Idyll. A good example of this is the description of Geraint:-

Nor weapon save a golden-hilted brand...
 A purple scarf, at either end whereof
 There swung an apple of the purest gold,
 Sway'd round about him, as he gallop'd up
 To join them, glancing like a dragon-fly
 In summer suit and silks of holiday. (MG 166...173)

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1. Mabinogion (1849) Vol II, pages 67-141 (English translation). Pages 142-196 contain notes to the Welsh tale, and resumes and extracts from the story in other languages.
 2. I have found H.G. Wright's study Tennyson and Wales (Essays and Studies XIV, 1929) which largely concerns Tennyson's alterations to the story of Geraint ap Erbyn, very useful in most respects, particularly in its analysis of the different ways the medieval and Victorian writer and audience thought of character and action. But Wright's essay has some serious omissions, notably the failure to indicate a radical transposition of characters which gives an insight into one of Tennyson's artistic methods.
 R.H. Shepherd's Tennysonianana (1st edition 1866, 118-121, and second enlarged edition of 1879, 128-134) prints extracts from Geraint ap Erbyn and Tennyson's Idyll uncritically.

This is a sophisticated portrait based on the original description:-

The rider was a fair-haired youth, bare-legged, and of princely mien, and a golden hilted sword was at his side, and a robe and surcoat of satin were upon him, and two low shoes of leather upon his feet, and around him was a scarf of blue purple, at each corner of which was a golden apple.¹

Similarly, when Geraint followed the strange knight and his lady, he saw that they:-

....climb'd upon a fair and even ridge,
And show'd themselves against the sky... (MG 239-240)

This is borrowed from the original detail:-

And the road they took was below the palace of Caerlleon, and across the ford of Usk; and they went along a fair, and even, and lofty ridge of ground until they came to a town.²

Not only are detailed descriptions followed, but also at times the ideas expressed by characters too. For example, in the second part of the tale after Geraint and Enid have gone into the wilderness, they first meet Limours. He alternately threatens to kill Geraint and to love Enid:-

'He sits unarm'd...
He shall not cross us more; speak but the word:
Or speak it not; but then by Him who made me
The one true lover whom you ever own'd,
I will make use of all the power I have.
O pardon me! the madness of that hour,
When first I parted from thee, moves me yet.' (GE 336-..347)

1. Mabinogion II, 72.

2. Mabinogion II, 75.

This fantastic proposition follows a similar note of contradiction in the original:-

.....if I slay the man yonder, I can keep thee with me as long as I chose; and when thou no longer pleasest me, I can turn thee away. But if thou goest with me by thy own good will, I protest that our union shall continue eternal and undivided as long as I remain alive.¹

Amongst other alterations and additions Tennyson adds blasphemy to Limours' catalogue of sins.

A good example of Tennyson's artistic rearrangement occurs in the briberies Doorm (or Limours, as it is in the original) attempts on Enid.² In the Welsh tale the bandit first wants Enid to clothe herself in finery, and when she refuses this he offers her an earldom. Then he offers her food, and finally drink. When all these offers are refused he boxes her on the ear. In Tennyson's Idyll the bandit first offers Enid an earldom, then bids her eat, drink, and finally, wear finery. At the crisis he smacks her on the cheek. So the details are rearranged to make a much more effective climax.

So much for Tennyson's closer following of the narrative and descriptive detail in the original tale. There are, however, some major rearrangements he has introduced into the Idyll to serve his own didactic scheme.

For my first example of these changes I have taken Tennyson's alterations to the hunt which begins the story. In the original

1. Mabinogion II, 117.
2. Mabinogion II, 132-133 and Geraint and Enid 652-717

Arthur lets Guinevere sleep on; but in the Idyll:-

.....Guinevere lay late into the morn,
Lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love
For Lancelot, and forgetful of the hunt... (MG 157-160)

Thus Tennyson takes the opportunity to work in Guinevere's liaison with Lancelot, one of the necessary threads of narrative throughout the Idylls. Also in reworking the hunt Tennyson omits many magic details that will not accord with a modern retelling of the tale,¹ and he drops any material which will not enhance Arthur.²

Tennyson alters some of the original characters entirely. The most interesting alteration is to Edryn. In the original there is little wrong with Edryn, apart from his pride. He has not deprived Yniol of his wealth and lands through greed. There was provocation, as Yniol himself explains:-

I lost a great earldom as well..... and this is how I lost them. I had a nephew, the son of my brother, and I took his possessions to myself; and when he came to his strength, he demanded of me his property, and I with-held it from him. So he made war upon me, and wrested from me all that I possessed.³

Tennyson however, makes Edryn the villain of the piece, and supplies

1. For example, one of the many courtiers was "Gwrdnei with cat's eyes, who could see as well by night as by day." Mabinogion II, 68.
2. Such as the king's command to his steward:- "Let the steward of the household be chastized, if all are not ready tomorrow for the chase." Mabinogion II, 70.
3. Mabinogion II, 78. Pointed out by Hallam Tennyson in Works (1913), 968.

(again in Yniol's words) an entirely different reason for Edryn's confiscation:-

When I that knew him fierce and turbulent
 Refused her to him, then his pride awoke;
 And since the proud man often is the mean,
 He sow'd a slander in the common ear,
 Affirming that his father left him gold,
 And in my charge, which was not render'd to him;
 Bribed with large promises the men who served
 About my person, the more easily
 Because my means were somewhat broken into
 Thro' open doors and hospitality;
 Raised my own town against me in the night
 Before my Enid's birthday, sack'd my house;
 From mine own earldom foully ousted me. (MG 448-460)

As well as presenting Edryn as a villain, Tennyson alters the original narrative. For in the original, after Edryn is sent to court little is heard of him. Then when Geraint defeats Dwrm (Doorm) he next encounters the Little King (Gryffid Petit).¹ After a hard struggle Geraint overcomes him and he must swear fealty. Later this fairy-tale character intervenes to save Geraint when the latter escapes from the castle of the Earl of Limours.

Now Tennyson has eradicated such magic elements as this amazingly small man just as he disposed of Gwynei and three giants earlier in the story.² Instead it is Edryn who is substituted for the Little King and

1. Mabinogion II, 122. "And he never saw a man of smaller stature than he who was upon the horse."

2. Mabinogion II, 130-131. An incident in which there are magic games in the mist is also omitted.

who accosts Geraint and Enid as they leave the castle. Thus the plot is simplified and made plausible by omissions and by the reintroduction of an early character. But it is a new Edryn who is introduced, transformed by the example set him at Arthur's court, and, as Arthur says:-

'I.....made him of our Table Round,
Not rashly, but have proved him every-way
One of our noblest, our most valorous,
Sanest and most obedient: and indeed
This work of Edryn wrought upon himself
After a life of violence, seems to me
A thousand-fold more great and wonderful
Than if some knight of mine, risking his life...
Should make an onslaught single on a realm
Of robbers, tho' he slew them one by one,
And were himself nigh wounded to the death.' (GE 907-918)

So Tennyson has altered the character to demonstrate a man's capacity to change radically for the better, given ideal circumstances to make the transformation.¹ And Edryn's transformation in turn forces Geraint to reflect on his own sins, so that thereafter he lives an exemplary life.

The last example of how Tennyson rehandles the material of the legend concerns the two evil characters who in the Idyll accost Geraint after he has vanquished Edryn. In the original tale Geraint and Enid first meet Dwrm (Doorm), one of Enid's rejected suitors. He it is who alternately threatens and flatters her. Later, after his victory over Edryn, Geraint is taken in a swoon to the castle of the Earl of Limours, and here, after gross insult to Enid, Geraint recovers to smite off the head of this offensive earl.

1. A little later circumstances at court change, so that Balin, a similar character to Edryn in many ways, does not learn to bridle his temper, and breaks many knightly ordinances only to kill his brother and to die himself.

In the Idyll, however, Tennyson has transposed these two characters. First Geraint and Enid meet the indelicate, dissolute Limours. He attempts by sophistry to seduce Enid. Later they meet the bandit earl, Doorm, and it is Doorm who insults Enid and who has his head smitten off for his pains. I think there are perhaps two reasons for this interesting transposition. Firstly Tennyson, acting on the suggestion of the sounds of their names, had made Limours (the name seems Norman French) affectedly French in style. And is not the very name Limours suggestive, because of its similarity to the profane word 'l'amour'?¹ Doorm (or Dwrn) is a Celtic name with a rough primitive sound to it, and from it Tennyson builds the red-bearded outlaw. If the sounds of the names initially suggested the possibility of the transposition, another reason was to sustain interest in the narrative, by keeping the stronger bolder character to the last.² Moreover by introducing Doorm later there is the opportunity to contrast his barbarity with the courteous Edryn, formerly as barbarous as the bandit earl.

1. "L'amour", based ultimately on the Latin "amor" or fleshly love, in contradistinction to "caritas" and higher forms of loving.
2. The description of Doorm and his hall is elaborate. Some of the main details are that he lives in the wastes (439); he is named The Bull, and is loud-voiced (541); he takes no notice of Enid's remarks (546-550). His followers are crude, and are compared to dogs (558-569); the hall itself is bare (569); nothing brought into it is handled gently (593); the women there are harlots (595-598); and they talk scandal of Enid (632-639). Doorm regards Enid as his property (646). He blasphemes (660) etc

Therefore Tennyson has fairly closely followed the story of Edryn's downfall in the first part of 'Geraint, Son of Erbin' in the Mabinogion for The Marriage of Geraint. But in Geraint and Enid he has altered the second part of the Welsh tale enormously, simplified it by the omission of magic incidents like the encounter with the Little King and the magic games in the mist, and instead he has reintroduced Edryn to exemplify the capacity of a man to change.

(ii)

Changes made to the Idyll after it was first published.

There is only one important alteration. When the story of Enid and Geraint was published as a single Idyll entitled Enid in 1859, at the point in the story where Geraint realises how changed Edryn is, he:-

.....changed himself, and grew
To hate the sin that seem'd so like his own
Of Modred, Arthur's nephew, and fell at last
In the great battle fighting for the King. (593-596)¹

Later however, in order to make this Idyll consistent with the conception of Arthur which evolved late in the writing, Tennyson had to suppress

1. Lines 593-596 of The Marriage of Geraint, and in its first form as part of Enid.

this reference to Modred's relationship to Arthur,¹ and in the final version of the Idyll the lines about Geraint read:-

.....he changed, and came to loathe
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself
Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last
In the great battle fighting for the King.

Clearly when writing the first Idylls Tennyson seized upon any relationships and references which seemed to authenticate Arthur as a real person with a real history. But later, after the writing of Guinevere, where Arthur's mystical birth is suggested, and then after the actual telling of his mystical coming in The Coming of Arthur, the earlier references to Arthur's human connections were omitted as inconsistent with the final design.

The separation of the work into two parts and its subsequent renaming have been discussed previously.²

1. Tennyson first selected Arthur's relationship to Modred from details given in Geoffrey of Monmouth, where Modred is the son of Arthur's sister, and therefore the king's nephew. In Malory on the other hand, the relationship between Arthur and Modred is repulsive, for Arthur begets Modred upon his own sister. In his search for authentic details Tennyson chose to omit this incest.

2. See Chapter III, 103.

CHAPTER VII

The Sources of Balin and Balan

The story in the Idyll is as follows:-

Messengers returning to Arthur with tribute from Pellam report one of their number treacherously slain. Two knights barring passage at a fountain are defeated by Arthur. When they report at Camelot they are found to be Balin and Balan, the former banished temporarily on account of his bad temper. Balan claims the quest of the knight who slays others treacherously from behind; and Balin remains on probation at court, and is granted Guinevere's device on his shield. (1-204)

One day Balin comes accidentally upon Lancelot and Guinevere in secret talk. Though he suppresses his suspicions he leaves court without permission. Reaching Pellam's hall he hears Garlon, Pellam's son, speak scandalously of Lancelot and Guinevere. Balin smites off Garlon's head; and in the ensuing uproar and pursuit he finds a lance in a chapel and uses it to vault to safety from the castle. (205-420)

Far from the hall he halts, disgusted at his unknighly conduct. By chance Vivien, a damsel from Mark's court, passes; and she tells him a foul story about the Queen. So Balin shrieks, and tramples on his shield bearing Guinevere's device. By great mischance Balan, his quest unaccomplished, hears this, and seeing someone trample on the queen's device, he attacks instantly. The two brothers wound one another mortally. Vivien unlaces their helms, to identify them, then leaves. They recover for a few moments to realise the sad truth, then die in one another's arms. (421-620)

Though Tennyson's Idyll has for its starting point Malory's early story of Balyn le Sauvage, Book II Chapters I-XIX, he recasts the tale entirely, eradicating almost all the magic and mystery that

is its mainstay in the Morte d'Arthur. The new tale borrows some incidents and expressions from the original, which I trace first, then I show the scope of Tennyson's invention in plot and characterisation. First of all I provide a very brief account of Malory's tale, so that the extent of Tennyson's departure from it can be seen.¹

In Malory Balin is a brave but unfortunate knight who disregards a warning not to keep a sword he has gained by might. With this sword he cuts off the head of the Lady of the Lake, and so is plunged into a series of fantastic adventures which lead him to give the "dolorous stroke," that is, to desecrate a relic in a chapel and so be led to kill his brother and to die himself. His distinguishing feature is that he bears two swords.

In one adventure, after escaping unhurt from a castle where he is trapped, by leaping out into the ditch, he reaches Pellam's castle. Here Carlon, Pellam's brother, smacks his face. Thus provoked, Balin retaliates by decapitating Carlon. Then Pellam chases him, and as his sword is now broken Balin seizes a lance he finds in a chapel, and pierces Pellam with it. Immediately the castle falls down, and Merlin passes and takes up Balin. Later the knight's way

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1. One who followed Malory's tale carefully, with the intention of showing how the tale could be handled in verse, in reaction to Tennyson's free interpretation of it, was Swinburne in his The Tale of Balen (1896). Swinburne was of course unhindered by any plan or purpose, so he could tell the tale straight. Yet though claiming a strict following of Malory he adds a year-cycle plan to enhance the telling, and this device is borrowed from Tennyson's use of it in the Idylls.

is barred past another castle. Very unwisely he changes his customary shield for a larger. His opponent, who is none other than his own brother, Balan, notices the two swords, but as the shield is unfamiliar, he attacks. They wound one another mortally, recognise each other, die shortly after, and are buried in the same tomb by Merlin.

A comparison between Tennyson's version and Malory's shows that Tennyson makes the two brothers reach their deaths in the same way, a mistake in identity, but the circumstances which bring this about have been altered almost entirely. Most of the barbarous magic in the original, such as the magic sword and the falling down of Pellam's castle have been omitted. Instead most of the tale is set at Arthur's court, and the main motivation is the relationship between Balin on the one hand and Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot and Vivien. First I trace what Tennyson has borrowed from Malory's story of Balin, and then I indicate borrowings from elsewhere in Malory. Then Tennyson's main inventions are considered. Finally I provide an appendix showing the various extant prose and verse versions of the tale Tennyson made before he composed the Idyll.

My first example of Tennyson's borrowing shows how he combined two dramatic events in Malory to make one of his own. At Pellam's hall Balin, after killing Garlon, escapes by vaulting with a spear:-

..... but from the castle a cry
 Sounded across the court, and - men-at-arms, -
 A score with pointed lances, making at him -
 He dash'd the pummel at the foremost face,
 Beneath a low door dipt, and made his feet
 Wings thro' a glimmering gallery, till he mark'd
 The portal of King Pellam's chapel wide
 And inward to the wall; he stept behind;
 Thence in a moment heard them pass like wolves
 Howling; but while he stared about the shrine,
 In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints,
 Beheld before a golden altar lie
 The longest lance his eyes had ever seen,
 Point-painted red; and seizing thereupon
 Push'd thro' an open casement down, lean'd on it,
 Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on earth. (392-407)

Despite the feeling of continuity in this passage, Tennyson has drawn upon two different events at castles noted previously in the resume of Malory's account. The Grail castle furnishes the setting:-

And whan balyn was wepenles he ranne in to a chamber for to seke somme wepen, and soo fro chamber to chamber, and no wepen he coude fynde, and alweyes kynge Pellam after hym. And at the last he entryd in to a chambyr that was merueillously wel dyzte and rychely, and a bedde arayed with clothe of gold the rychest that myghte be thoughte, and one lyenge theryn, and theryby stode a table of clene gold with four pelours of syluer, that bare up on the table, and vpon the table stood a merueillous spere straungely wrought. And whan balyn sawe that spere, he gat it in his hand and torned hym to kynge Pellam.¹

Tennyson has taken the means of Balin's escape from a separate event two chapters earlier in Malory when Balin escapes from the castle of Maidens:-

and anone as balyn came within the castels yate the portecolys fylle doune at his bak, and there felle many men about the damoyssel, and wold haue slayne her. When balyn sawe that, he was sore agreued, for he myghte not helpe the damoyssel, and thenne he went yp to the toure and lepte ouer the wallys in to the dyche, and hurte hym not, and anone he pulled oute his suerd and wold haue foughten with hem.²

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1. Book II Chapter XV
 2. Book II Chapter XIII.

Thus in the Idyll Balin effects his escape from Pellam's hall by vaulting with the spear, and Malory's magic is omitted.

Further examples of Tennyson's recombination of material are the details taken to describe the dying moments of Balin and his brother.

Balin recovers first:-

Thenne balan yede on al
four feet and handes and
put of the helme of his
broder and myght not
knowe hym by the vysage,
it was so ful hewen and
bledde.₁

Thenne departed Balyn
from Merlyn and sayd
in this world we mete
neuer no more.₂

.... and there (The Lady of
the Tower) heard how
they made her mone eyther to
other and sayd we came
bothe oute of one
tombe that is to say one
moders bely.₃

But when their foreheads felt the
cooling air,
Balin first woke, and seeing that
true face,
Familiar up from cradle-time, so wan,
Crawl'd slowly with slow moans to where
he lay.... (578-581)

'O brother,' answer'd Balin, 'woe is me!'
..... and now
The night has come. I scarce can see thee
now.
Good night! for we shall never bid again
Good morrow. (607-612)

Good night, true brother, here! Good
morrow there!
We two were born together, and we die
Together by one doom: (617-619)

Tennyson has singled out vivid material from Malory connected with Balin, Balan, Merlin and an eye-witness of the two knights' deaths, and has incorporated it directly in his narrative as words said by his main

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1. Book II Chapter XVIII.
 2. Book II Chapter XVI.
 3. Book II Chapter XVIII.

character, Balin. Also it is noteworthy that to add to the tragic irony he has made the two brothers twins: "We two were born together..." based upon the detail in the Morte d'Arthur that they came from "One moders bely."

One of the opening incidents in the Idyll borrows from elsewhere in Malory, where Pellinore successfully bars the way to all comers beside a fountain. He even defeats Arthur himself, who is only saved by Merlin's intervention.¹ This incident gave Tennyson the idea for Balin and Balan pitching camp at a fountain and barring the way to everybody.

Now I consider Tennyson's inventions. As I have already indicated, the main invention is the series of incidents between Balin and Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot and Vivien. I have selected four features which best illustrate the kind and extent of these inventions:- (i) Balin's character, (ii) an incident which shows the development of the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, (iii) Pellam's idolatry and Garlon's profanity, and (iv) the part Vivien plays in the story.

Balin, who has been banished for half killing a churl (in Malory the banishment is for slaying a knight) is readmitted to court, and takes his knightly model from Lancelot:

1. Book I Chapters XX-XXIV

.....now would strictlier set himself
 To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,
 Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hover'd around
 Lancelot, but when he mark'd his high sweet smile
 In passing, and a transitory word
 Make knight or churl or child or damsel seem
 From being smiled at happier in themselves -
 Sigh'd....

.....So Balin, marvelling oft
 How far beyond him Lancelot seem'd to move,
 Groan'd and at times would mutter, 'These be gifts
 Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,
 Beyond my reach....."

(154.....172)

He believes it is the respect with which Lancelot and Guinevere hold one another that has made Lancelot's courtesy flourish, so in order that his own powers of courtesy may likewise flourish, he asks and obtains permission to wear Guinevere's device on his shield.¹ Then he sees the thrall again:

And once he saw the thrall
 His passion half had gauntleted to death,
 That causer of his banishment and shame,
 Smile at him, as he deem'd, presumptuously:
 His arm half rose to strike again, but fell:

(214 - 218)

However, at this time Balin regains his control.

In the second invented incident I select, Balin overhears Lancelot and Guinevere conversing in a bowered walk. The queen questions her knight about his lack of courtesy:-

'Art thou sad? or sick?
 Our noble King will send thee his own leech -
 Sick? or for any matter anger'd at me?'
 Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
 Depp-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue
 Changed at his gaze: so turning side by side
 They past, and Balin started from his bower.

(269-275)

1. Tennyson may have borrowed this idea of Balin bearing Guinevere's device on his shield from Malory's description of the "Queen's Knights" (Book XIX Chapter I). These were young knights bearing shields deliberately blank, who served their chivalric apprenticeship by escorting the queen.

The queen's transition from a dignified courtier to a solicitous lover (in the third line of the quotation) and the developments thereafter, leave no doubt in Balin's mind of the true nature of the relationship. What at the time of The Marriage of Geraint was a mere rumour has now come into the open, and is an observed fact. When Balin realises the implications of this all his restraint vanishes, and he leaves court without permission.

The third of Tennyson's inventions I consider concerns the characters of Pellam and Garlon. Strictly speaking, Tennyson's handling of the two characters is more an alteration than an invention as such, for in Malory Pellam is a vague Grail king who guards the spear which pierced Christ at the Crucifixion; and his brother Garlon has a black face and the power to move unseen. Starting on this basis Tennyson reworks the characters completely, so that in the Idyll Pellam appears as a Victorian obscurantist¹ and his son Garlon,² stripped of his supernatural powers, as a bad-tempered rake resorting to harlotry with Vivien. In Tennyson both characters epitomise hypocrisies. Pellam's hypocrisy is to be intolerant of everything human - he has even disposed of his faithful wife.³ Garlon on the other hand has his hypocrisy exposed when he speaks to Balin

1. See, for example, the elaborate description of Pellam's hall, Balin and Balan 91-116, and 326-331.
2. In Malory Garlon is Pellam's brother. Tennyson alters the relationship to show how one extreme begets another.
3. Balin and Balan 103.

about Guinevere:-

'Fairest I grant her: I have seen; but best,
Best, purest? thou from Arthur's hall, and yet
So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these
So far besotted that they fail to see
This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame?
Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes.' (351-356)

This criticism of Guinevere works up to a climax when Balin smites off Garlon's head, and has to flee for his life.

What may be considered the other major invention of Tennyson is the introduction of Vivien into the story of Balin.¹ Tennyson first introduces her into the Idyll as Garlon's paramour, and later she meets Balin in the forest. There she tells him a lie about the Queen:-

.....one summer dawn -
By the great tower - Caerleon upon Usk -
.....this fair lord,
The flower of all their vestal knighthood, knelt
In amorous homage - knelt - what else? - O ay,
Knelt, and drew down from out his night-black hair
And mumbled that white hand whose ring'd caress
Had wander'd from her own King's golden head,
And lost itself in darkness, till she cried -
I thought the great tower would crash down on both -
"Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips,
Thou art my King." (498-509)

This story adds fuel to the fire raging already in Balin's mind, and he shrieks and tramples upon his shield bearing the Queen's device. His brother is brought to the scene by the noise and, seeing someone trample on Guinevere's coat of arms, he attacks. So Vivien is successful from the start, because of the corruption beginning at Arthur's court.

1. Vivien (or Nimue) appears only occasionally in Malory. Her first real appearance is not until Book IV when she employs Merlin's spell upon himself, and later in the same book enchants in turn Pelleas and Ettarre.

Thus the Idyll of Balin and Balan is largely Tennyson's own story, with the occasional incorporation of incidents and details from Malory's book of Balin le Sauvage reworked into the invented narrative. In fact the only identical detail Tennyson and Malory have in common is the battle between the brothers and the tragic moments thereafter until they die.¹

Appendix

Various drafts in prose and verse of Balin and Balan

It was Tennyson's custom in the later Idylls to write out prose drafts of the story before he set about verse composition. This helped him to form a clear picture of the narrative.² Prose drafts of The Holy Grail, Pelleas and Ettarre, Gareth and Lynette and Balin and Balan are noticed in the Memoir,³ and that of Balin and Balan is printed as a specimen. A comparison between this prose draft and the published Idyll reveals many differences. It is amazing to see crude details in the prose story refined and rearranged in the completed Idyll to form a more harmonious whole. Inevitably in the process of selection some good ideas or developments have to be dropped, and others in turn suggest themselves. As it is the only complete specimen of a prose draft published, and therefore of interest in showing in another way how Tennyson has built up the Idylls, I include a brief comparison of it with the Idyll.

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1. In Malory, however, Balin lingers till the following midnight. To make for greater unity and stronger irony Tennyson makes the two brothers die at the same time.
 2. "I can always write when I see my subject whole." Memoir II, 7.
 3. Memoir II, 134.- 141, where it is called 'The Dolorous Stroke'.

Among the more interesting changes the thrall whom Balin smote in anger, an incident that led to his banishment, was killed in the prose version of the tale, but was only severely injured in the Idyll. This is a change which makes Balin's subsequent reprieve more credible. Balin merely rides away on quest in the prose version; in the Idyll it is to seek the demon of the woods, who slays knights treacherously from behind. In the prose version also, there is no specific incident where Balin observes Lancelot and Guinevere acting suspiciously together; but in the Idyll he witnesses a specific incident which focusses attention sharply on the state of affairs at court. Moreover in the prose version Balin reaches Pellam's castle directly, and there, having become depressed by Garlon's discourtesies, he hears tales told by the churls about Garlon's powers of moving unseen and how he attacks knights treacherously. This impression of Garlon's treachery is brought forward in the Idyll, where Balin hears of Garlon's reputation long before he reaches Pellam's hall. En route to the hall he is almost slain from behind.

In the Idyll Vivien rides away casually when the two brothers have wounded one another fatally. This is a vast improvement on the Vivien who hides among the leaves to overhear their dying words, in the earlier sketch. Then a notable change is that the Lady of the Lake finds and buries Balin and his brother, in the prose sketch. In the Idyll, the Lady of the Lake was dropped, probably because the conception of her changed during the writing of the last Idylls when she developed into an ethereal personage.

Thus the main development as the prose sketch was made into verse as an Idyll, is that of providing satisfactory motivation for Balin's actions.

Extracts and details from two other drafts of Balin and Balan (and other material which eventually was incorporated as an addition to Merlin and Vivien) are noted in Six Tennyson Essays.¹ The deductions that can be made from the publication of these fragments again show many good ideas developed and dropped by Tennyson. For example in the prose fragment taken from Book 'A' it is stated that Garlon hated Arthur because he was not allowed to join the Round Table. Then at Mark's court as a guest Garlon and Mark over wine scorned Arthur and his institutions.

If this is the earliest of the prose sketches then it appears that Tennyson first thought of Garlon hating Arthur because denied membership of the Round Table, but later transferred the hatred and the reasons for it to king Mark.

In the verse fragment in Book 'B' there is variant ending to the story of Balin. In this version Vivien goes to Camelot with locks of hair taken from the corpses of Balin and Balan. At Camelot Guinevere wishes to test Vivien further, so she sends knights out with her to find and bury the bodies. Vivien now feels she has proved her worth, but Guinevere hesitates to admit her. However she goes off hawking with Lancelot, so Vivien is forgotten and works evil at court.

1. The essay on "MSS. of the 'Idylls of the King'" published in Six Tennyson Essays (1949) by Sir Charles Tennyson, p 169.

Tennyson dropped the gruesome details, but kept the situation which allowed Vivien to gain entrance to the court. This incident later was located in the addition made to Merlin and Vivien.

CHAPTER VIII

(1)

The sources of Merlin and Vivien

There are few similarities between Tennyson's Idyll and the brief episode of Merlin's incarceration by Nimue in Malory Book IV Chapter I. In Malory neither Merlin nor Nimue is clearly defined, and the fault is largely Merlin's, for he "was assoted vpon her that he myghte not be from her... and she was euer passyng wery of him." In the Idyll the reverse is true, for it is Vivien who follows Merlin everywhere and gives him no peace. Actually it is known that Tennyson drew mainly from the notes to the preface in Volume I and the concluding notes in Volume II of Southey's edition of Malory entitled Kyng Arthur.¹ After examples of Tennyson's borrowings and his major inventions have been shown, the

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1. In his interesting study The Growth of the Idylls of the King (Philadelphia 1895) pp 31-39, Richard Jones points out similarities between Merlin and Vivien and some notes to Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion derived ultimately from Southey's Kyng Arthur.

G.S. Haight, in an article 'Tennyson's Merlin' Studies in Philology XLIV (1947) points out many of the parallels between Merlin and Vivien and the sections of the notes on Merlin in Kyng Arthur directly.

The chief sections borrowed are from Kyng Arthur Vol I Introduction xliii-xlviii, particularly xlv-xlvi, and Vol II, 463-494.

second section of the chapter deals with the additions to Merlin and Vivien made after 1859¹. The story in the Idyll is:-

Vivien, a harlot from Mark's court in Cornwall, is lucky at being allowed to remain unchallenged at Camelot. Having failed in her primary object, the seduction of Arthur, she sets herself to ruin the kingdom by enslaving Merlin, Arthur's principal counsellor and help. The sage goes to Broceliande in Brittany to avoid her, but she follows him, hoping to procure a spell that can make anyone powerless. (1-216)

At Broceliande a battle of wits ensues. Vivien says she wants the spell as proof conclusive of their mutual affection, and she promises not to use it on him. Merlin replies with stories of how women misuse power, and then asks if she intends using the spell on anyone in the Round Table. She scorns Arthur's institution, speaking scandal of many, especially Lancelot and Guinevere. (217-770)

Merlin repudiates her gossip but cannot deny truth in what she has said of Lancelot and the queen. This encourages Vivien to slander all at Arthur's court. Merlin now realises how foolish it would be to reveal the spell, and he mutters words to himself about her which she overhears. She becomes vicious, then lapses into weeping. The old man is sorry for her; and to comfort her he tells her the spell. In an instant she has worked it upon him. Thus leaving him imprisoned in the forest she goes off triumphantly to work more evil. (771-972)

First I have selected some of the similarities between the Idyll and Southey's account of Merlin, and then I have traced the other Arthurian sources.

First, when the spell Vivien seeks is described:-

The which if any wrought on anyone
With woven paces and with waving arms,
The man so wrought on ever seem'd to lie
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which was no escape for evermore;
And none could find that man for evermore,
Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm
Coming and going.....

(204-211)

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1. The only other poet to treat this story is Matthew Arnold in the close of Tristram and Iseult (1852) where Iseult of Brittany tells the story of Merlin's incarceration by Vivien to her children. See Chapter I, 30.

This description of the spell echoes some things in Southey's synopsis. First Vivien plots "how she might detain him for ever more," and when the spell is cast Merlin wakes, and "it seemed to him that he was inclosed in the strongest tower in the world."¹ Later in the note Merlin tells Gawain "you will never see me more.... and when you shall have departed from this place I shall never more speak to you nor to any other person, save only my mistress; for never other person will be able to discover this place for anything which may befall."²

Suggestions of Vivien's reptilian nature, when she approached Merlin and

..... holding by his heel,
 Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
 Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
 Together, curved an arm about his neck,
 Clung like a snake.....³ (236-240)

may have been suggested by a different note later in Southey's edition of Malory where in a variant version of Merlin's incarceration by the Lady of the Lake she states:-

"Merlin," said the lady, "you are advised that I am a white serpent of which you have many times prophesied."⁴

At times the actual wording of the characters in the synopsis is followed.

1. Introduction xlv to Kyng Arthur.
2. Introduction to Kyng Arthur, xlvi.
3. Also her description as a 'viper frozen' (842-3), and her hair clasped with a 'snake of gold.' (886).
4. Kyng Arthur II, 464.

For example, later in their duel of wits Vivien complains:

I ever fear'd you were not wholly mine. (313)

This is a remark similar in its phrasing to the words:

"Certes," said the lady, "you have done so much that I am wholly yours."¹

Again, when she pleads for the spell:

As proof of trust. O Merlin, teach it me. (329)

This remark echoes her demand in the synopsis, where she asks:

I do not yet know one thing which I would fain know, I pray you teach me it..... I would not have you do it, but you shall teach me.....²

Later still, when Merlin suggests that tokens are not required of love:

'Full many a love in loving youth was mine;
I needed then no charm to keep them mine
But youth and love.... (544-546)

This may be an allusion to Merlin's youthful pleasures in the observations:

The Merlin of the prophecies, unlike the Merlin of the romance, is profligate in his amours.³

Finally Tennyson, in giving a tree for Merlin's incarceration rather than a bush, cave or tower, may have borrowed another detail from

1. Kyng Arthur I, Introduction xliv.
2. Kyng Arthur, Introduction xlv.
3. Kyng Arthur II, 463.

a tradition still current, mentioned at the end of Southey's synopsis:

This is the account of Merlin's fate current at this time among the Bretons. Some of their traditions say, that he is still alive, enclosed in a tree by the power of a greater enchanter than himself.¹

It is notable that to increase the irony Tennyson has chosen an oak tree, suggestive of great strength and age, but above all the tree sacred to the Bards, for the wizard's incarceration.

As in the other Idylls, there are indications of Tennyson borrowing from other episodes in Malory. For example, when Vivien at the very beginning describes her background to King Mark:

My father died in battle against the King
My mother on his corpse in open field;
She bore me there, for born from death was I
Among the dead and sown upon the wind - (42-45)

it may be a borrowing from the story in Malory of Tristram's birth. Tristram's mother, Elizabeth, hearing her husband had been taken prisoner by another woman, rushed out into the forest:

And whanne she was ferre in the forest she myghte no ferther for she byganne to trauaille fast of her child. And she had many grymly throwes.. And soo by myracle of oure lady of heuen she was delyuerd with grete paynes. But she had taken suche cold for the defaute of helpe that depe draughtes of deth toke her.²

Also a borrowing from a note in the Mabinogion occurs in the description of the well that bubbled up when iron was thrown into it;³ and when

1. Kyng Arthur I, xlviii.
2. Book VIII Chapter I.
3. Merlin and Vivien 426-430, based upon the note on the Forest of Breceiliande and the Fountain of Baranton, Mabinogion I, 225.

Vivien refers to Merlin's infernal birth:

.....ye yourself
 Know well that envy calls you devil's son (464-465)

this information is supplied in all the chronicles, but from the wording in the detail it is taken from Malory's episode of Merlin and Nimue:

for she was aferd of hym by cause he was a deuyls sone.¹

It is difficult to indicate clearly how extensive and pervasive is Tennyson's invention. He invents almost all the brilliant dialogue and penetrating interplay of character between the mage and the clever harlot, and many separate incidents and stories setting the seduction of Merlin into a wider Arthurian picture. Among incidents Tennyson invented to show Vivien's attempts to corrupt the court, is that in which she attempts the seduction of Arthur:-

For once, when Arthur walking all alone,
 Vext at a rumour issued from herself
 Of some corruption crept among his knights,
 Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,
 Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood
 With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,
 And flutter'd adoration, and at last
 With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more
 Than who should prize him most; at which the King
 Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by. (151-159)

I select another incident which shows how Tennyson, in revealing Vivien's true colours, cleverly mixes invention with borrowing. She accuses most of the members of the Round Table of sin, including Sir

1. Book IV Chapter I.

Valence, Sir Sagramore, and Sir Percivale.¹ Sir Valence's episode is invented. Tennyson's tale of Sir Sagramore's seeming misconduct may be based upon a suggestion arising from the appellation the knight always carries in Malory, Sir Sagramore "le Desirous;" or it may be an echoing of a similar occasion elsewhere in Malory.² The story told of Percivale is in fact a simplified account of what does happen to him in Malory.³ Merlin easily refutes Vivien's charges, but he is unable to deny that made against Lancelot and Guinevere. Instead he reveals how their love originated:-

Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,
To fetch her, and she watch'd him from her walls.
A rumour runs, she took him for the King,
So fixt her fancy on him: let them be. (772-775)

This story, Tennyson's early invention,⁴ is all the encouragement Vivien needs, and she lets nothing be until she has undermined Arthur's institution.

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1. That of Sir Valence takes up 702-717; Sir Sagramore 718-743; and Sir Percivale 744-765.
 2. When the beaten Sir Persant of Inde orders his daughter to go to bed with Sir Gareth, the victor. Gareth asks her whether she is married or a maid, and on learning that she is the latter he states either he will leave or she must (Book VII Chapter XII).
 3. Book XI Chapters XI and XII, where he is tempted by the devil in the guise of a woman, and fortunately resists the temptation.
 4. It first occurs in the Manuscript notes of a scenario. See Chapter III, 62. Another situation originating the love of Lancelot and Guinevere is mentioned in Ellis's Specimens: "...and at the first appearance of the youthful candidate, the graces of his person, which were not inferior to his courage and activity, made an instantaneous and indelible impression on the heart of Guenever, while her charms inspired him with an equally ardent and constant passion." Specimens I, 310.

Finally as an example of the duel of wit I select Vivien's pertinacity over the matter of the spell, and Merlin's attempt to prevent her enquiry going further:-

'Ye have the book: the charm is written in it:
Good: take my counsel: let me know it at once:
For keep it like a puzzle chest in chest,
With each chest lock'd and padlock'd thirty-fold,
And whelm all this beneath as vast a mound
As after furious battle turfs the slain
On some wild down above the windy deep,
I yet should strike upon a sudden means
To dig, pick, open, find and read the charm:
Then, if I tried it, who should blame me then?'

.....
'Thou read the book my pretty Vivien!
O ay, it is but twenty pages long,
But every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text that looks a little blot,
The text no larger than the limbs of fleas;
And every square of text an awful charm,
Writ in a language that has long gone by.
So long, that mountains have arisen since
With cities on their flanks - thou read the book!
And every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm'd
With comment, densest condensation, hard
To mind and eye...
And none can read the text, not even I;
And none can read the comment but myself;
And in the comment did I find the charm.'

(649-681)

Thus Tennyson has based certain of his wordings in the dialogue and the general drift of Vivien's seduction of Merlin upon details about the enchanter in the notes to the preface in Volume I and the concluding notes in Volume II of Southey's edition of Malory entitled Kyng Arthur; but a minor detail or two is taken from incidents in the actual text of the Morte d'Arthur. But many anecdotes, and descriptions in the brilliant dialogue, and the development of the story so that it is not, in fact, merely the end of Merlin but the undermining of the whole of Arthur's realm are Tennyson's own contributions.

(ii)

There are two additions to Merlin and Vivien made in 1872, the first one major. The additions were attempts to bring the Idyll into line with others.

The first addition, some 140 lines (6-146) is the greatest development of the Mark motif, which was first introduced into the Idylls in 1872 in Gareth and Lynette,¹ where Mark attempts to bribe his way into the Round Table, and his bribe is rejected. So Mark is anxious for revenge, and in the addition to Merlin and Vivien:

For he that always bare in bitter grudge
The slights of Arthur and his table, Mark
The Cornish king, had heard.....
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl,
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,
Sware by her. (6...14)

Therefore Mark knows the opportunity is present and sends Vivien as a troublemaker to Camelot:

Here are snakes within the grass;
And you, methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear
The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting. (33-36)

After luckily gaining permission to remain in Camelot, she watches Guinevere go hawking at Lancelot's invitation:

'Is that the Lancelot? Goodly - ay, but gaunt;
Courteous - amends for gauntness - takes her hand -
That glance of theirs, but for the street, had been
A clinging kiss - how hand lingers in hand!
Let go at last! - they ride away - to hawk
For waterfowl. Royaller game is mine. (101-106)

1. Gareth and Lynette 376-427.

and she starts to corrupt:

.....then, as Arthur in the highest
 Leaven'd the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
 Arriving at a time of golden rest,
 And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
 While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,
 And no quest came, but all was joust and play,
 Leaven'd his hall. They heard and let her be. (135-144)

Thus Tennyson's first addition has been to show that not only Modred works evil at court, but that Mark has taken action by sending Vivien to Camelot to create discord, and that the court is at a stage at which it is most vulnerable.

The second brief addition emphasises Merlin's powers of prophecy mentioned in Malory, particularly that he himself would soon die, and that Arthur would fight a great battle in the west,¹ and incorporates as a premonition the battle in the mist in The Passing of Arthur. It is therefore a connective device between Idylls, and anticipates Arthur's passing and the ruin of the realm:

He walk'd with dreams and darkness, and he found
 A doom that every poised itself to fall,
 An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
 World-war of dying flesh against the life,
 Death in all life and lying in all love,
 The meanest having power upon the highest,
 And the high purpose broken by the worm. (188-194)

-
1. In Malory Merlin states that Arthur will have to fight a great battle beside Salisbury, in which his own son Modred will be against him, Book I Chapter XI. And in Book I Chapter XX he feels he will die shamefully.

CHAPTER IX

(1)

The Sources of Lancelot and Elaine

Tennyson has followed the beautiful story of Elaine given in Malory Book XVIII closely.¹ First I trace some of his borrowings and blendings from Malory and from other versions of the tale and other Arthurian sources and then some of the rearrangements, alterations and additions he made to the story. Additions made to the Idyll after its publication are traced in the second section.

The story of the Idyll is as follows:

Elaine has Lancelot's shield for safekeeping, and he has taken a blank one. This has come about when Lancelot at Camelot, thinking the sick queen requires him near her, declines to enter the ninth annual diamond jousts. Later he learns she wants him to enter, for if both are absent from the lists, gossip will arise. So he leaves court, comes to Astolat where Elaine falls in love with him and receives his shield, and then he returns to court in disguise with the blank shield. (1-396)

-
1. In Notes and Queries 5th Series Vol. X (1878) E.C. Brewer points out the chief similarities between Tennyson's Idyll and Malory's Book XVIII.

In the ensuing tournament though sorely wounded Lancelot is victor. He leaves before receiving the diamond prize, and Gawain is sent to hand the diamond to the winner. Reaching Astolat, he learns the true identity of the one he seeks, and gives the diamond to Elaine. She in turn locates Lancelot and tends him till he is well. He visits Astolat briefly, but cannot return her affection, and so leaves for Camelot. (397-981).

Elaine pines away and dies, and her last wish is to be carried by boat to Camelot. Lancelot meanwhile hands Guinevere the diamonds, only to have them rejected because of the rumours she has heard about his association with Elaine. The queen throws them out of the window at the very moment the dead Elaine passes below on a barge. The barge stops at the palace, and in Elaine's hand is found a letter absolving Lancelot from all blame in her death. When Arthur reads it Guinevere realises how wrong she has been; and Lancelot is filled with remorse. (982-1418)

This story is essentially Malory's account, containing Lancelot's journey to Astolat, Elaine's custody of his shield, his attending a joust in strange armour, Elaine's love for him, and her despairing gesture. How closely most of the details in the original are often followed, is given by this account of how Lancelot agreed to wear Elaine's favour at the tournament:

Soe thus she cam to
and fro, she was so hote
in her loue that she
besoughte syr launcelot
to were vpon hym at
the justes a token of
hers.

Faire damoyssel said
sir launcelot, and yf
I graunte yow that
ye may saye I doo
more for youre loue
than euer I dyd for lady
or damoyssel.

Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not - noble it is,
I well believe the noblest - will you wear
My favour at this tourney?'

'Nay,' said he,
Fair lady, since I never yet worn
Favour of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who me, know.' *know*

Elaine who suggests that wearing the token will disguise him more effectively. Also Malory's Lancelot at no time refuses the token, whereas Tennyson's Lancelot refuses the offer before he accepts it. These small alterations emphasize the power of Elaine's love, and Lancelot's honesty.

An example of Tennyson's borrowing from elsewhere in the Morte d'Arthur occurs at the end of the Idyll, when Lancelot broods over Elaine's death:

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man. (1417-1418)

This is based on the statement occurring in Malory a little earlier, during the grail quest:-

but god knoweth his thought and his vnstabylnesse, and yet shalle
he dye ryght an holy man.¹

Another detail Tennyson adopts from elsewhere in Malory than the actual tale of Elaine, and which he elaborates into a clever device, is that of the diamond won at the diamond jousts. Jousting for a diamond occurs in the chapter following the death of Elaine,² but in Malory this jousting has no connection with the tale. First briefly in the early scenario,³ and then elaborately in the Idyll, Tennyson exploits the diamond motif. In the Idyll even before she meets Lancelot, Elaine dreams of receiving and then losing a diamond.⁴

1. Book XVI Chapter V.

2. Book XVIII Chapter XXI. Jousting for diamonds also occurs in Book XIX Chapter XIII.

3. See Chapter II, 62.

4. Lancelot and Elaine 211 - 215

Lancelot has already won eight diamond tournaments, and requires but to win this one and then he will have sufficient diamonds to make a necklace for the queen. When he is wounded, he leaves the field without the prize. Arthur sends Gawain to deliver it, but he carelessly hands it instead to Elaine. The diamond gives Elaine false hopes that love can arise between herself and Lancelot, and she delivers it to the great Knight and tends his wounds until he is well. Finally Lancelot returns to Camelot, and he has the diamond added to the other eight as a necklace, which he gives to the queen. However, she throws the necklace out of a window and it hits the water at the very moment Elaine's funeral barge passes below. Thus the addition of the diamond into an already complex narrative provides valuable motivation for many of the actions, gives an ironical twist to much of the tale, and aids distinct characterisation. It is certainly one of Tennyson's happiest developments. Tennyson may have recourse to other versions of the story of Elaine for ideas in the Idyll. For example when the Queen heard Lancelot sported a strange favour, she:

Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shriek'd out 'Traitor' to the unhearing wall,
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

(605-610)

Malory records nothing of this, but there is a passage in an abstract of the metrical romance Le Morte Arthur provided in George Ellis's

Early English Romances₁:-

This conversation, which took place in the presence of Guinevere, sunk deep into her heart; she retired to her chamber; abandoned herself to the most violent transports of jealousy; and secluded from all but her confidential attendants, left King Arthur and his courtiers to amuse themselves without her.

which may have been echoed by Tennyson.

When Gawain, attracted to Elaine before he knows whose shield she keeps, thinks:-

Well - if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me. (640)

Tennyson may have based this detail, not mentioned in Malory, on the same abstract or on the metrical romance itself. In the abstract Gawain:-

.....after requesting the maiden that he also might, for Lancelot's sake, have the honour of being admitted amongst her knights, took his leave, and returned to court.₂

In the metrical romance upon which the abstract is based, Gawain's intentions are expressed more strongly:-

So that he knew welles at the laste
That the Mayde of Ascalote was she,
Which he som tyme had wowyd faste
His owne leman for to be,
But she answeryd hym 'Ay' in haste,
To none bot Launcelot wold she te.₃

Tennyson may have noticed the detail in the abstract, particularly as

1. Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances Vol. I, 336.
2. Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, Vol I, 336.
3. Le Morte Arthur edited by Thomas Ponton from Harleian MS. 2252, (Roxburghe Club, 1819), lines 1012-1017.

another detail found in it may have been borrowed earlier, or he may have read the original metrical romance. But it is just as possible that he invented the detail as one of many alterations and additions to the character of Gawain found in Malory.

Tennyson also drew upon Ellis's collection for the details he gives of Lancelot's upbringing, in the soliloquy Lancelot gives at the close of the Idyll, where he speaks:-

'Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms....
She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son," and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!' (1392..1401)

In Ellis's abstract Queen Helen went to the aid of her dying husband, and when she returned she:-

discovered the little Lancelot in the arms of a nymph, who on her approach suddenly sprung with the child into a deep lake, and instantly disappeared. This nymph was the beautiful Vivian, the mistress of the enchanter Merlin, who thought fit to undertake the education of the infant hero at her court, which was situated within this imaginary lake; and hence her pupil was afterwards distinguished by the name of Lancelot du Lac.¹

Characteristically, Tennyson makes the mere a real lake, not an imaginary one, and to accentuate this he makes the Lady of the Lake pass on it magically.

And to this soliloquy of Lancelot on Elaine's death Tennyson has subjoined his reaction during the Grail quest when he is told that he

1. Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances I, 309.

It also occurs in Chapter III of J.C. Dunlop's The History of Fiction (1814).

will not experience it fully:-

and so departed sore wepyng, and cursed the tyme that he was borne.]

Tennyson also has recourse to a particular collection of ancient chronicles for the passage in Nennius's Historia² which recounts the twelve battles Arthur fought. These battles are put into Lancelot's mouth, as he relates them to Elaine:-

..... as having been
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
 And in the four loud battles by the shore
 Of Douglas; that on Bassa; then the war
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
 Of Celidon the forest; and again
 By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
 Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
 And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,
 When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Trecoit,
 Where many a heathen fell; 'and on the mount
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King
 Charge at the heard of all his Table Round,
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,
 And break them;'

(284-305)

In Nennius's chronicle the battles are enumerated:-

Then it was, that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons... The first battle in which he was engaged, was at the mouth of the river Gleni.+

+ Supposed by some to be the Glem, in Lincolnshire, but most probably the Glen, in the northern part of Northumberland.

1. Book XIII Chapter XIX.

2. Nennius's History of the Britons published as one of Six Old English Chronicles ed Giles for Bohn's Antiquarian Series (1848).

The second, third, fourth, and fifth, were on another river, by the Britons called Duglas, in the region Linuis. The sixth on the river Bassas, = the seventh in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon. The eight was near Gurnion castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the City of Legion, which is called Cairlion. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Bregnoin, which we call Cat Bregon.⁶ The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon.¹

= Not a river, but an isolated rock in the Firth of Forth, near the town of North Berwick, called "The Bass."

⁶ Or Agned Cathregonion, Cadbury, in Somersetshire, or Edinburgh.

Here it can be seen that Tennyson chooses the euphonic Glem (situated in Lincolnshire) than the historically exact Glen; prefers Bassa as the footnote has it, an island, rather than the river of the text; and selects the sonorous Miltonic-sounding Agned Cathregonion given in the footnote, to the Cat Bregon of the text. Two names are also altered in spelling, to make for greater euphony, and the picture Nennius gives of Arthur bearing an image of the Virgin on his shoulders is altered. Arthur now wears the image on his breastplate. We may note also the casual manner the battles are linked by conjunctions as Lancelot relates them, in an offhand fashion as if as a participant he was thoroughly familiar with them, and required no hard thinking to summon them back to memory.

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1. Historia Brittonum par. 50, with the particular footnotes found in its publication in Six Old English Chronicles ed. for Bohn's Antiquarian Series (1848). This is pointed out by Hallam Tennyson in Works (1913), 972.

Finally, I give an example of Tennyson's borrowing from his earlier Arthurian poetry. This borrowing also shows clearly how Tennyson was influenced by Irish legends in representing they supernatural. When Elaine's death is described:-

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
 All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
 That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
 With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house
 That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd
 The father, and all three in hurry and fear
 Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
 Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!' (1012-1019)

This echoes many of the invented details and circumstances surrounding the death of the Lady of Shalott in the earlier poem, particularly her singing her last song, and the weird change of weather when the spell takes effect. More striking than this are the similarities between Elaine's death and the description of the Kyhirraeth,¹ particularly in the brothers' reference to a 'Phantom of the house/That ever shrieks before a death.'

I chose two examples of the scope of Tennyson's additions to the story of Elaine, that of Elaine's minatory dream, and of Lancelot's discourtesy when he leaves her. When the unknown Lancelot has newly arrived at Astolat he hears Lavaline, who is anxious to go to the

1. For a discussion of the influence of Irish legendry upon Tennyson's poems, and particularly the account of the Kyhirraeth, see Chapter II, 40.

diamond jousts, speak of his sister's curious dream about the diamond:-

..... the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike... (211-215)

This addition of Tennyson's is one of ⁿmay to the Idylls showing the importance and meaning of dreams in foreshadowing the future.¹

Another invented addition is the circumstances in which Lancelot leaves Elaine. Her father advises him:-

'Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.' (965-967)

Accordingly when Lancelot goes, he does not turn his head, although he knows she is watching from a window:-

Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone,
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used. (973-981)

Thus though in the main Tennyson's narrative is based on Malory's story of Elaine, details are adopted from a version of the story of Elaine given in an abstract of the alliterative Morte Arthure (Harleian MS 2252) supplied in Ellis's Specimens, and in one case there is possibly a borrowing from the actual metrical romance itself; and also Tennyson

1. There is a network of dreams, visions and trances running throughout the Idylls, at least one to each Idyll, and twenty six in all.

incorporates the famous passage in Nennius's chronicle in which Arthur's battles are named, as given in the compilation Six Old English Chronicles.

(11)

Additions and Alterations to Elaine (1859)

Tennyson made two important alterations and omitted a line. The line omitted concerns Arthur:-

For Arthur, when none knew from whence he came....

This is omitted in later republication, for of course Merlin and Bleys, and later Bellicent and Leodegran know of Arthur's origins in The Coming of Arthur. What is significant about the line, however, is that it shows that from the beginning Tennyson had hit upon an unworldly supernatural king.¹

An alteration is to suppress Gawain's relationship to Arthur, one of many changes made in the earlier written Idylls suppressing Arthur's mortal relationships.²

The second alteration substitutes the name Gareth for Lamorack as next in strength to Lancelot, Tristram and Geraint.³ The original

1. See Chapter III, 84-85.

2. Lancelot and Elaine 534-5. See Chapter VI page for similar suppressions regarding Arthur and Modred.

3. Lancelot and Elaine 555-556.

name Lamcrack is simply an accurate observation from Malory,¹ and is not necessarily an indication that Tennyson intended treatment of this knight at some time.

1. Malory Book VII Chapter IX *passim*.

CHAPTER X

The Sources of The Holy Grail

For reasons given previously, Tennyson treated the Grail story in a single Idyll,¹ whereas in the Morte d'Arthur the Grail is mentioned very early;² before it appears to all the knights at Camelot, Percivale, Ector and Lancelot are healed by it;³ and the complicated story of the quest takes up five books.⁴ There are many interruptions in the telling of it, one quest being dropped inexplicably for another. No doubt a medieval reader, knowing the story's outcome, found that these constant interruptions enhanced the telling; but a modern reader finds them tedious.

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1. For a discussion of Tennyson's original Arthurian scheme, which did not include treatment of the Grail, and then for the various steps which led to the Grail's inclusion, see Chapter III pages 86-94.
 2. Book II Chapter XI passim.
 3. Book XI Chapter XIV and Book XII Chapter IV.
 4. Books XIII-XVII.

Accordingly Tennyson simplifies the story by dropping four of the nine quests Malory relates, and by paying little attention to two others;¹ and he alters the order in which the stories are told, by giving Galahad's account early and leaving Lancelot's account to the last to serve his own purpose in the Idylls as a whole. The simplified and reworked story is put into the mouth of Percivale, a character who in Malory has nothing to say when his quest is complete.²

The Idyll is as follows:-

Many years after the Grail quest has happened, Percivale tells his fellow monk Ambrosius about it. It started when his sister had a vision of the Grail; and she gave Galahad a sword belt. Then one day when Arthur was absent from court, the Grail came. Galahad alone saw it; the other knights swore to follow until they saw it. Before they went Arthur held a tournament at which Galahad and Percivale were the victors. (1-337)

1. The quests of Uwayne, Colgrevice, Ector and Lionel are dropped. Also Tennyson pays much less attention to Bors and Gawain than Malory.

2. In Malory Bors is the only successful Grail knight to return and it is he who relates Galahad's and Percivale's adventures.

There are three contemporaneous poems on the Grail. Arthur's Knights (An Adventure from the Legend of the Sangraal) anon 1859, follows Malory closely in very uneven verse. Robert Stephen Hawker's striking and original The Quest of the Sangraal (composed 1864) was never completed, but he struck out an authentic version of the quest. Thomas Westwood's The Quest of the Sangraall (1868) in following Malory unskilfully, imitates Tennyson's verse techniques and borrows from Hawker's poem also.

Percivale then tells Ambrosius about his own quest. Beset by doubts and fantasies, he wandered fruitlessly, until he reached the palace of a beautiful woman who had loved him previously. For a time he dwelt there, but one day he remembered his quest, reached a hermitage and there confessed his sins. Then he encountered Galahad. On resuming the quest Percivale was left far behind by Galahad, but he saw the Grail for a moment before Galahad entered the spiritual city. Soon he met Bors, who told him of his imprisonment and miraculous release, and who had glimpsed the Grail. The two returned to Camelot, only to find it had suffered earthquake in the meantime. (338-707)

Percivale reported Galahad's adventures and his own to the king. Then Arthur questioned Gawain, who spoke merely of merriment. Bors admitted he had seen the Grail, but said no more. Finally Lancelot told of how he journeyed to Carbonek and reached the door of the room where the Grail was kept, but was there repulsed by flame, so that he did not know whether he had in fact seen the Grail or not; and what he might have seen was covered with a veil. The king then stated that he needed no Grail quest to convince him of spiritual reality at hand always. (708-915)

I have selected incidents and passages where the variety of Tennyson's borrowings is greatest, so that the extent of his method can be seen. A good example of this is the reorganisation of many details chosen from different books of the romance, in order to build a convincing and connected account of Percivale's sister, and her inspiring Galahad to undertake the Grail quest:-

I dwelled with the grettest
man of the world and he
made me so fayre and
clere that there was
none lyke me.¹

...and on the morne at
ye houre of prime at
galahads desyre he
(Lancelot) made him
knyghte and sayd, God
make hym a good man
for beaute fayleth hym
not as any that lyueth.²

And so she pray'd and fasted, till
the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, thro' her,
and I thought
She might have risen and floated
when I saw her.

And one there was among us, ever
moved
Among us in white armour,
Galahad.
"God make thee good as thou art
beautiful,"
Said Arthur, when he dubb'd him
knight.

1. Book XIV Chapter VIII.

2. Book XIII Chapter I.

(Dame Elaine tricks Lancelot into sleeping with her)...For wel she knewe that same nyght shold be goten vpon her Galahalt that shold preue the best knyghte of the world.₁

lo lordes said she, here is a gyrdel that oughte to be sette aboute the suerd. And wete ye wel the grettest part was made of my here which I loued wel whyle that I was a woman of the world... I clypped of my here, and made this gyrdel in the name of God.₂

And thenne she gyrte hym aboute the myddel with the swerd.₃

Sister or brother none had he;
but some
Call'd him a son of Lancelot,
and some said
Begotten by enchantment -
chatterers they...
For when was Lancelot wanderingly
lewd?

But she, the wan sweet maiden,
shore away
Clean from her forehead all that
wealth of hair
Which made a skilful mat-work for
her feet;
And out of this she plaited broad
and long
A strong sword-belt.....

.....and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange
device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam;
And saw the bright boy-knight, and
bound it on him...
(98...156)

First Tennyson takes a hint in Malory's description of a woman whom Percivale meets on quest, expands it into a full portrait, and transfers it to describe Percivale's own sister before the quest begins. Then Lancelot's action and remarks in the Morte d'Arthur as he dubs his son Galahad knight, are transferred to Arthur to keep him the central figure.

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1. Book XI Chapter II.
 2. Book XVII Chapter VII.
 3. Book XVII Chapter VII.

Also one of the unpalatable incidents in Malory is altered, in which Lancelot is deceived into begetting Galahad upon a certain Dame Elaine. Instead of being a fact, in the Idyll this is mentioned as a mere opinion held by gossips. And to close this preparatory episode Tennyson selects an incident very late in the Grail story in the romance, the giving of the sword belt to Galahad, and relocates it at a time before the Grail itself has appeared to the knights. In relocating this episode Tennyson adds a detail of his own, the device woven into the Grail belt. And all is so reworked to give the impression of a natural and connected narrative, and not simply a mosaic of pieces put together from Malory.

An example of close borrowing from Malory is the scene in which the Grail appears to all the knights at Camelot;¹ but even here many circumstances incidental to the appearance are rearranged. In Malory Arthur, knowing the Grail quest is imminent, holds a tournament before it appears; and when the Grail appears at Camelot the king witnesses it with his knights. In the Idyll, on the other hand, the Grail appears as a surprise to all but Galahad; the king himself is not present at its appearance; and then he holds a farewell tournament before his knights set off on quest.²

1. Book XIII Chapter VII and The Holy Grail 182-202.
2. In a minor alteration, in keeping with the knight's portrait developed throughout the Idylls, at the Grail's appearance Gawain is made to swear loudest of all, not, as in Malory, to be the first to swear.

As a further example of Tennyson's reworking, I select his building up of Percivale's adventures from incidents and hints in Malory. In the Idyll when Percivale sets off he is obsessed by his doubts. In fact this doubting of his underlies his whole behaviour on the quest:-

.....every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, "This Quest is not for thee." (371-374)

In such a mood he first reaches a brook running through orchards and meadows:-

"I will rest here,"
I said, "I am not worthy of the Quest;"
But even while I drank the brook, and ate
The goodly apples, all these things at once
Fell into dust, and I was left alone
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns. (385-390)

One of several fantasies that afflict him similarly, is that of a golden knights:-

Then I was ware of one that on me moved
In golden armour with a crown of gold
About a casque all jewels; and his horse
In golden armour jewelled everywhere:
And on the splendour came, flashing me blind;
And seem'd to me the Lord of all the world,
Being so huge.

Then at some time on the quest¹ he reaches a land where a wealthy and beautiful widow who has loved him formerly, requests him to remain.

-
1. Percivale first tells Ambrosius about his fantasies, then goes on to tell of his following of Galahad as far as he could towards the spiritual city. Finally he tells of his dwelling for a time with a rich widow previous to his meeting with Galahad, but does not give the exact time this happened.

Forgetting his vow, Percivale does so, but later in a moment of remorse he returns to his quest. Eventually he meets Galahad, follows him as near as he can to the spiritual city, then returns to Camelot to report to the king.

Firstly the doubt that is Tennyson's basis for all of Percivale's conduct is but one brief passage in Malory, where the knight, travelling through desert regions, meets a hermit and tells him:-

I am of kynge Arthurs Courte, and a knyghte of the table Round, the whiche am in the quest of the Sancgreal, and here I am in grete duresse and neuer lyke to escape oute of this wyldernesse. Doubte not sayd the good man and ye be soo true a knyghte, as the ordre of chyualry requyreth, and of herte as ye oughte to be, ye shold not doubte that none enemy shold slay yow.¹

Before this understandable expression of doubt Percivale had a dream, in which he had to fight:-

....with the strongest champyon of the world.²

This champion gave Tennyson the idea for one of Percivale's fantasies, the meeting with the huge golden knight; while Percivale's first fantasy, in which when thirsty he reaches a pleasant brook only to find it fall away to sand and thorns, is borrowed from an experience of Sir Ector's on quest in Malory, when he dreamt about Lancelot. In the dream Lancelot reached a well, only to find when he came to

1. Book XIV Chapter VII.

2. Book XIV Chapter VI.

quench his thirst that the well was an illusion:-

....and so he rode tyll he cam to the fayrest wellle that euer he sawe, and syre Laucelot alyghte and wold haue dronke of that wellle. And whan he stouped to drynke of the water the water sanke from hym.¹

Tennyson reverts to parts of Percivale's quest in Malory for the rest of the account of the knight in the Idyll. Thus the idea for the Percivale's stay with the rich widow is based upon one of several of his meetings with women in the romance, particularly one in which he almost commits adultery with the devil in the guise of a woman.² Then his seeing the Grail for a moment when he tries to follow Galahad to the spiritual city, if it has a basis in Malory at all, is probably based not on a reworking of the final incident where Percivale, Bors and Galahad are fed by the Sangreal in Sarraas just before Galahad is taken up to heaven,³ but on a suggestion before the Grail appears at Camelot, in which Percivale and Ector, after fighting and almost killing one another, are healed by the Grail's appearance, at which time:-

....they coude not redyly see who bare that vessel, but syre Percyuale hadde a glemerynge of the vessel and of the mayden that bare hit, for he was a parfyte clene mayden....⁴

This brief sight of the Grail may have given Tennyson the idea of Percival's brief vision of the Grail in the Idyll.

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1. Book XVI Chapter II. It is more forcibly expressed in Malory's original, La Queste del Saint Graal (Roxburghe Club 1864) ed. Furnivall, where Lancelot is also told by Ector that he will "alons querre che nous ne trouerons iamaiz."
 2. Book XIV Chapter IX.
 3. Book XVII Chapter
 4. Book XI Chapter XIV.

Though Tennyson simplifies Galahad's quest, he borrows vivid details from Malory:-

And thenne the Bisshop made
semblaunt as thouz he wold
haue gone to the sacrynge of
the masse. And thenne he tooke
an vbblye whiche was made in
lykenes of breed. And at the
lyftyng vp, there came a fygur
in lykenes of a chylde, and
the vysage was a reed and as
bryghte as ony fyre and
smote hyself in to the breed...¹

And at the sacring of the mass
I saw
The holy elements alone; but
he,
"Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw
the Grail,
The Holy Grail, descend upon the
shrine:
I saw the fiery face as of a
child
That smote itself into the bread
and went...
(462-467)

But in the Morte d'Arthur Bors, Percivale, and Galahad all witness this mystery; so Tennyson elevates Galahad by giving him the only full sight of the Grail at this time; by making Percivale see only the elements; and by omitting Bors altogether from this incident.

Tennyson rebuilds Bors' adventures in much the same way, by isolating for him an experience which in the romance is shared by all three; but first of all I wish to show how Tennyson expands a mere hint in Malory into a full character portrait of the knight and his spiritual limitation. At the outset Bors' self-effacement prevents him from readily experiencing the Grail:-

He well had been content
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen. (650-651)

1. Book XVII Chapter XX.

This is based upon a remark Bors makes to a hermit during his very full adventures in the romance:-

For wete ye wel there is no thyng in the world but I had leuer doo hit than to see my lord sire launcelot du lake to dye in my defaute.¹

With Bors' faint-heartedness as basis, Tennyson develops the character on his own lines:-

And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,
And found a people there among their crags,
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left
Paynim amid their ciroles.... the rough crowd,
Hearing he had a difference with their priests,
Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell
Of great piled stones.....

..... -till by miracle - what else? -
Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,
Such as no wind could move.....

..... - "O grace to me! -
In colour like the fingers of a hand
Before the burning taper, the sweet Grail
Glided and past, and close upon it peal'd
A sharp quick thunder." Afterwards, a maid,
Who kept our holy faith among her kin
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go.' (657...695)

This is reworked from two separate details in Malory:- Gawain and Ector's remarks when they meet during the quest; and an occasion in which the three Grail knights are imprisoned.

When Gawain and Ector met they:-
complained them gretely that they could fynde none aduenture.²
Later Galahad, Percivale and Bors, after many adventures together, are put in prison by king Estoraue:-

1. Book XVI Chapter XI.
2. Book XVI Chapter I.

Thenne the kynge was a tyraunt, and was come of the lyne of paynymys, and toke hem, and putte hem in a depe hole.But as soone as they were there our lord sente hem the Sancgreal, thorow whoos Grace they were all waye fulfilled whyle that they were in the pryson.¹

In Malory Estorause shortly releases his prisoners; but Tennyson makes Bors' release due to two things, a naturalistic miracle when a great stone falls away from his prison, and then his release by a maiden.

When Arthur asked Gawain about his quest the latter told him that it was:-

"..... not for such as I.
Therefore I communed with a saintly man,
Who made me sure the Quest was not for me;
For I was much aweared of the Quest:
But found a silk pavilion in a field,
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale
Tore my pavilion from the tering-pin,
And blew my merry maidens all about
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me." (738-747)

Thus Tennyson follows Malory broadly in depicting Gawain's attitude to the quest, for the knight, having "lyued mescheuously many wynters,"² went on quest but "fonde none aduenture that pleasyd hym." But in Malory Gawain meets no adventure with maidens,³ and so the incident related in the Idyll may either be Tennyson's invention to show Gawain's carefree outlook, or Tennyson may have drawn it from the ballad "The

1. Book XIII Chapter XVI

2. Book XVI Chapter I.

3. In fact when he encounters Galahad the latter wounds him so severely that he has to forgo the quest (Book XVII Chapter I.)

"Jeaste of Sir Gawain" in a famous contemporary collection of romances and ballads about the knight.¹

As Malory's account of Lancelot's quest is vivid and more artistic than the other quests, Tennyson borrows closely and extensively from it. I am not therefore going to trace the many borrowings, but I wish instead to show how closely Tennyson's portrayal of Lancelot's failure accords with Malory. Early on in Malory Lancelot comes to a chapel but can find no entrance to it;² then he sees a sick knight healed by the Grail, but he cannot himself approach the holy vessel.³ Later a hermit tells him that on account of his sin no matter how hard he now strives to find and see the Grail, it will not reveal itself to him;⁴ and finally the people at Carbonek, once he has been repulsed from the Grail, tell him that he has seen as much of it as he will ever see:-

.....neuer shall ye see of the Sangreal no more than ye haue seen. Now I thanke God said launcelot of his grete mercy of that I haue seen, for it suffyseth me...⁵

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1. "The Jeaste of Sir Gawain", a ballad relating Gawain's amorous enterprise with a girl in a pavilion. published in Sir Gawayne ed. Sir Frederick Madden for the Bannatyne Club (1839)
 2. Book XIII Chapter XVII.
 3. Book XIII Chapters XVIII-XIX
 4. Book XV Chapter II.
 5. Book XVII Chapter XVI.

Tennyson follows this carefully in his description of Lancelot's sight of the Grail:

"O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All pall'd in crimson samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.
And but for all my madness and my sin,
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw
That which I saw; but what I saw was veil'd
And cover'd; and this Quest was not for me." (843-849)

Though most of the incidents in The Holy Grail are, as we have seen, a radical reworking of Malory there is one skilful reference to a detail in another Idyll. This is when Lancelot hears a voice in the castle of Carbonek as he approaches the room containing the Grail:-

But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward: (829-832)

While this is partly based on the description of Carbonek in Malory, when Lancelot:-

herd a voyce whiche sange so swetely that it seemed none erthely thyng¹.
it is also a reference to the lily maid of Astolat, who had guarded Lancelot's shield:-

High in a chamber up a tower to the east.
(Lancelot and Elaine)⁴

1. Book XVII Chapter XV.

That this occurs to Lancelot at this time illustrates the workings of his own conscience, and his partial realisation of his own guilt in the matter of Elaine's death.

The two histories of the Grail published for the Roxburghe Club and republished by the Early English Text Society,¹ do not seem to have influenced Tennyson's conception of the Grail story, though there is a rhythmic parallel between one of the French versions and the Idyll. In the latter the words Lancelot hears in Carbonek before the room in which the Grail is kept are:-

'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord,
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'(836-837)

This approximates more to the rhythm of the French in La Queste del Saint Graal:

gloire, et loenge, et honours, soit o toi, peres des chieus₂
than to Malory's:-

Joy and honour be to the father of heaven.₃

This is the nearest approximation to a parallel there appears.

Tennyson's imaginative treatment so pervades the Idyll that it is difficult to show examples of it clearly. What is a distinct invention

1. For these prose histories of the Grail, see Chapter III, 77.
2. La Queste del Saint Graal (1864), p 225.
3. Book XVII Chapter XV.

as opposed to imaginative rearrangement for the sake of the story or for the didactic intent, is Tennyson's conception of Arthur. As an example of this conception, I give the king's concluding words to his knights:-¹

"And some among you held, that if the King
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow.
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done; but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day
Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air
But vision - yea, his very hand and foot -
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen." (899-915)

In these lines, which Tennyson himself called the "spiritually central" lines of the *Idylls*,² he sets the quests for the Grail and the actual appearance of the Grail itself into a perspective, so to speak, and shows that the man of true religious insight neither shuns nor exploits the world for his own gain, but accepts the responsibility of his place in it and the tasks he must perform if the spirit is to stay alive in himself and all other men with whom he comes in contact.

1. In Malory the King laments the departure of his knights on quest, (Book XIII Chapter VIII), but he rejoices when they return, (Book XVIII Chapter I).

2. Memoir II, 90.

Thus Tennyson has made comprehensive use of Malory's Grail books to build his Idyll, but his borrowings are so selective and so reworked as to appear a new story. The two most interesting of his methods of selection and simplification can be outlined:- he takes but a remark or an isolated and minor incident in the Morte d'Arthur and bases the entire conduct and outlook of one of his characters upon it, such as his characterisation and conduct of Percivale, Bors, and Gawain; and he takes an experience common to the three chief Grail knights - Galahad, Percivale, and Bors - and gives it to but one of these knights. Thus the quests are kept distinct, and can be treated, as it were, in idyllic form. The story so separated, simplified, rearranged and redistributed among its principal participants is put into the mouth of Percivale, a character who in Malory merely retires to a monastery on the completion of his quest. And as part of this reorganisation the Grail itself, instead of appearing often to many knights, and healing or inspiring them, appears constantly to Galahad, briefly to Percivale and Bors, in veiled form to Lancelot, and not at all to any others. Finally, Tennyson's invented conclusion spoken by Arthur sets the various quests in perspective, and keeps the King the central figure of the Idylls.

CHAPTER XI

(1)

The Sources of Pelleas and Ettarre

The story of Pelleas and Ettarre occurs swiftly and early in Malory in four chapters of Book IV.¹ Tennyson follows the incidents in the story such as Pelleas' infatuation with Ettarre; his fighting for her and winning a golden circlet; and Gawain's falsity very closely. He also devises a number of changes and additions, so that the behaviour in the Idyll exemplifies the decline in the kingdom after the failure of the Grail Quest. The story in the Idyll is as follows:-

The inexperienced Pelleas meets some damsels led by Ettarre in the forest of Dean, and guides them to Caerleon. He wins jousts for a golden circlet there and gives the prize to Ettarre. She, however, returns to her castle, and the infatuated youth follows. At the castle he is treated shamefully. (1-264)

Gawain appears, and when he hears Pelleas's predicament, promising to convert Ettarre to a favourable view of the lovesick man, he gains access to the castle by a trick. Three days later Pelleas himself enters, only to find Ettarre and Gawain asleep in one another's arms. He wants to kill them, but eventually leaves the castle in a fury. (265-477)

1. Book IV Chapters XXI-XXIV.

He reaches Percivale's retreat, and there hears of the illicit love of Lancelot and Guinevere which is corrupting the whole Round Table. Leaving Percivale, Pelleas encounters Lancelot, and though unarmed he accuses and attacks him, so incensed is he at the sin that has indirectly caused his own grief. Lancelot unhorses but disdains to kill him. The two enter Caerleon's great hall together, and from their demeanour all know something terrible has taken place. Modred knows his chance will come soon. (478-597)

For my first example of Tennyson's use of Malory in the *Idyll*, I have chosen the account when Pelleas enters the castle of Ettarre three days after Gawain has gained admittance:-

Thenne syre Pelleas mounted
vpon horsbak, and cam to the
pauelions that stode without the
castel, and fonde in the fyrst
pauelione thre knyghtes in thre
beddes, and thre squyers lyggynge
at their feet, thenne wente he
to the seconde pauelione and fond
four gentylwymmen lyenge in four
beddes, and thenne he yede to
the thyrd pauelion and fond
syr gawayn lyggynge in bedde
with his lady Ettard and eyther
clyppying other in armes.¹

Then he was ware of three pavilions
rear'd
Above the bushes, gilden-peakt: in
one,
Red after revel, droned her lurdane
knights
Slumbering, and their three squires
across their feet:
In one, their malice on the placid lip
Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her
damsels lay:
And in the third, the circlet of
the jousts
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and
Ettarre. (419-426)

Tennyson has, however, added details and exaggerated another to emphasize the licentiousness. So the knights are drunken; the pages lie across their feet; and Ettarre wears the circlet given by Pelleas.

-
1. Book IV Chapter XXIII. Perhaps it is this incident which makes Tennyson treat Gawain as frivolous throughout the *Idylls*. Malory treats him nobly or ignobly according to his sources. It is odd to reflect that in the earliest romances Gawain is the epitome of honour, and advises others of the correct behaviour for a knight when he has a lady alone and his power.

Many other passages could be chosen illustrating how closely has been Tennyson's following of the narrative and its details up to the point Pelleas leaves the castle.

Then Tennyson devises an entirely new ending, but before I consider that there is one borrowing from a different part of the Morte d'Arthur Tennyson utilises to close the Idyll. It is when a silence descends in the hall at the entry of Lancelot and Pelleas:-

And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand.' (597)

This expression is suggested surely by Lancelot's words to the queen late in Malory, when he says:-

Also madame wete ye wel that there by many men spoken of our loue in this courte and haue you and me gretely in a wayte, as sire Agraayne and sir Mordred.₁

Now that Tennyson's debt to Malory's story has been outlined, I wish to consider his additions made to fit the story into the pattern of the Idylls. Firstly in Malory Ettarre behaves contemptuously to Pelleas from the beginning:-

And soo he chose her for his souerayne lady, & neuer to loue outhur but her, but she was so proude that she had scorne of hym and sayd that she wold neuer loue hym thouz he wold dye for her.....₂

Tennyson alters this, however. For a short time so that she can gain the circlet, Ettare lets Pelleas think she is in love with him:-

'O the strong hand,' she said,
'See! Look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,
That I may love thee?' Then his helpless heart
Leapt, and he cried, 'Ay! wilt thou if I win?'
'Ay, that will I,' she answer'd... (120-125)

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1. Book XVIII Chapter I.
 2. Book IV Chapter XXII.

Tennyson's alteration is to accentuate the spreading corruption in the realm.

Now in Malory after Pelleas discovers Gawain's treachery and leaves the castle, he falls sick of his love. One of his followers, meeting Nimue in the forest, tells her what has happened. She repairs to Pelleas, cures him by enchantment, and enchants Ettarre in turn so that she it is who sickens for love of her late lover, and dies. Thus Nimue and Pelleas "loued to gyders durynge their lyf dayes."¹

Tennyson omits this story of enchantment and instead he treats the ending naturalistically, as on other occasions where there is magic. He also takes the opportunity to emphasize the corruption at court in the incident he invents. Pelleas first meets Percivale, now retired to a hermitage after his Grail quest. Here he hears Percivale suggest the love of Guinevere and Lancelot;² and then in a rage he meets Lancelot and clashes against him:-

'No name, no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.'
'Yea, but ~~thy~~ name?' 'I have many names,' he cried:
'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.'
'First over me,' said Lancelot, 'shalt thou pass,'
'Fight therefore,' yell'd the youth, and either knight
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung
His rider, who call'd out from the dark field,
'Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.'

1. Book IV Chapter XXIV.

2. Pelleas and Ettarre 513-527.

Then Lancelot, 'Yea, between thy lips - and sharp;
 But here will I disedge it by thy death.'
 'Slay then,' he shriek'd, 'my will is to be slain,'
 And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fall'n,
 Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
 'Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.' (553-570)

The two ride off, but enter hall together. Pelleas fails to address the queen as is customary. All realise something has happened, and in a magnificent ending, locking this Idyll into the series:-

The Queen
 Look'd hard upon her lover, he on her;
 And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
 And all talk died, as in a grove all song
 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
 Then a long silence came upon the hall,
 And Modred thought, 'the time is hard at hand.' (591-597)

Thus Tennyson has based most of the details of the Idyll upon the story of Pelleas and Ettarre in Malory, but some magical details are omitted at the end of it, and replaced by the inventions of Pelleas's meetings with Percivale and Lancelot, to show how widespread is the corruption in and around the court.

(ii)

There is but one interesting alteration, and a significant addition. The original description of Pelleas's moonlit entry to the bower where Gawain and Ettarre lay reads:-

Then he crost the court,
 But saw the postern portal also wide
 Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all
 Of roses white and red, and wild ones mixt
 And overgrowing them.... (409-413)

Later, this section reads:-

Then he crost the court,
And spied not any light in hall or bower,
But saw the postern portal also wide
Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt
And overgrowing them...

The substitution of brambles for the imprecise 'wild ones' symbolises the deception awaiting Pelleas more strongly, and the insertion of the line describing the absence of light increases the suspense.

Tennyson also added a song to the Idyll, "A rose, but one, none other rose had I."¹ This was to make it consistent with the other Idylls, which had songs in them to epitomise their theme at some crucial point in the narrative. The two exceptions to this plan are The Holy Grail and The Passing of Arthur, where such a device is not in keeping with the theme and its treatment.

1. Pelleas and Ettarre 391-400.

CHAPTER XII

The Sources of The Last Tournament

Practically all the incidents that are knit together in the Idyll have no foundation in Malory or any other Arthurian romance or chronicle. The story is Tennyson's own, contrived to provide a picture of the depths of corruption to which the court has sunk at this time just before the exposure of Guinevere and Lancelot.¹ A few scattered details are borrowed from Malory to give the impression of an authentic story of Arthur, and I first trace these borrowings to show what little substance in Malory there is for the happenings and developments in the Idyll.

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1. Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse (begun 1869, published 1882), though it purports to present the story "not diluted and debased as it has been in our time by other hands, but undebased by improvement and undeformed by transformation," gets little closer to the original story of Tristram and Isolt than Tennyson's. The magic potion is Swinburne's excuse for a fierce eroticism on the part of the lovers. Swinburne had earlier attempted the theme in Queen Yseult (1859), the first part of which was published in Undergraduate Papers in December of the same year. The remaining five parts did not see publication until the Bonchurch edition of 1925, along with Joyeuse Garde, yet another poem on the theme, and Sir Lancelot.

Following this I give an account of Tennyson's major inventions. The Idyll is as follows:-

Tristram has won the carcanet of rubies at a tournament judged by Lancelot in the absence of the king on a mission against northern rebels. After his award Tristram behaves immodestly, and Dagonet, the king's jester, accuses him of falsity to two women: Iseult of Brittany, whom he married after she tended his wounds, and Iseult of Ireland, whom he has long loved though she is wedded to King Mark of Cornwall. Tristram excuses himself by saying that no others at court behave any better. (1-358)

Tristram now sets off for Lyonesse to visit Iseult. He rests the night in a turf lodge he made formerly when he wandered in the forest with her. In the lodge he dreams he paces the shores of Brittany, and the two Iseults fight between themselves for the carcanet he has won. Meanwhile Arthur defeats the northern rebel, but his own knights run wild and massacre innocent people as well as the guilty. (359-485)

Tristram arrives at Tintagel, but Mark has informed Iseult already that Tristram is married to the Breton princess. She must still accept Tristram's love, however, because the alternative is even more unacceptable, to be left alone with Mark. At the close of twilight Tristram gives Iseult his carcanet of rubies when Mark steals up behind him in the darkness, and cleaves him through the brain. (486-756)

It is noticeable from this summary that at no time does Tennyson allude to the magic potion which is the cause of the behaviour of Tristram and Iseult. Much later he wanted to repair the omission by writing a great stage drama on the central incident of the legend, but it was to remain only a project.¹ It may be remarked that the Tristram story is one of Malory's less satisfactory works,² but this in no way

1. See Memoir II, 373

2. It runs to great length and considerable repetition. There are far too many unmotivated encounters between knights, and little human interest. It spreads itself across three books of forty one, forty three, and eighty eight chapters respectively.

justifies Tennyson's approach, exploiting the baser element in the relationship between Tristram and the two Iseults for the purposes of showing the degradation existing at King Arthur's Court. But from Malory's account of Tristram the following details can be noted:

Tristram is described as an accomplished hawker and harper; he is engaged in an incident with Dagonet, the king's jester, and he is slain treacherously by Mark in a lurid manner.

Firstly Malory records Tristram's prowess as harper and hunter:-

And so Trystram lerned to be a harper passynge alle other... And after as he growed in myght and strengthe he laboured euer in huntynge and hawkyng...¹

In the Idyll he is introduced wearing a holly spray,² symbolic of venery as crest, and on his shield he bears a spear, a harp and a bugle.³ As he rides back to Iseult of Cornwall his hunting instinct is described:-

Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye
For all that walk'd, or crept, or perch'd, or flew.
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape
Of one that in them sees himself, return'd;
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,
Or even a fall'n feather, vanish'd again. (363-372)

-
1. Book VIII Chapter III. Also referred to in IX Chapter XVII.
 2. The Last Tournament 170.
 3. The Last Tournament 174.

Tennyson further borrows from Malory in basing the badinage between Tristram and Dagonet, the king's jester, upon a singular incident during Tristram's madness when in exile:-

And vpon a day Dagonet kynge Arthurs foole came in to Cornewaile with two squyers with hym, and as they rode thorough that forest, they came by a fayre welle, where sir Tristram was wonte to be, and the whether was hote, and they alyghte to drynke of that welle, and in the meane whyle their horses brake lous. Ryght soo sire Tristram came vnto them, and fyrst he sousyd sire Dagonet in that welle....¹

Another borrowing of the figure of the fool is at the end of the Idyll when Arthur, on his return from crushing the rebellion, is met by a sobbing creature on the dark stairway of his palace. It is the fool, who states:-

I am thy fool
And I shall never make thee smile again. (755-756)

This is based on the following information about Dagonet given in Malory:-

For kyng Arthur loued hym passynge wel, and made hym knyght his owne handes. And att euery turnement he beganne to make kynge Arthur to laughe.²

Finally, for his picture of Tristram's death as he gives Iseult the carcanet:-

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek -
'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him thro' the brain.
(747-748)

1. Book IX Chapter XIX
2. Book X Chapter XII.

Tennyson bases this on how Tristram met his fate at Mark's hands:-

Also that traytour kyng slewe the noble knyghte syre Trystram as he sat harpyng afore his lady la Beale Isoude with a trenchaunt glayue, for whos deth was moche bewaylynge of euery knyghte that euer were in Arthurs dayes.¹

Though not a source as such, an explanation why Tennyson alters the story of Tristram so radically is the portrait of the knight given at times in Malory. In tournament Tristram smites down Arthur² and battles with Lancelot.³ Also many critics reviewed the legend unsympathetically, stating that the central incident of the magic potion was a mere excuse for the romancers to depict adultery.⁴ Perhaps Tennyson was influenced in his interpretation by these critics.

As a first example of the scope of Tennyson's invention, I chose the renegade Red Knight's message to Arthur:-

"Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I
Have founded my Round Table in the North,
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
My knights have sworn the counter to it - and say
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess
To be none other than themselves - and say
My knights are all adulterers like his own,
But mine are truer, seeing they profess
To be none other; and say his hour is come,
The heathen are upon him, his long lance
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw. (77-88)

-
1. Book XIX Chapter XI.
 2. Book X Chapter LXIX.
 3. Book IX Chapter XXXIV.
 4. For example Southey, Kyng Arthur introduction xv-xvi; J.C. Dunlop's The History of Fiction (1816) Vol. I page 236; Thomas Wright's Essays on the Literature, Superstitions and History of England in the Middle Ages (1846) Vol.I. pages 42-43.

When Arthur goes off and is victorious over the renegade, however, he loses control over his knights and they run amuck.

Meanwhile Lancelot is delegated to be the judge of the tournament to which Tristram comes and is victorious. A small description during the tournament forbodes the future when:-

..... once the laces of a helmet crack'd,
And show'd him, like a vermin in its hole,
Modred, a narrow face: (164-166)

As a final example of Tennyson's invention I select part of Tristram's talk with Iseult just before he is murdered by Mark. First Tristram refuses to swear loyalty to Iseult:-¹

'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark
More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt
The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself -
My knighthood taught me this - ay, being snapt -
We run more counter to the soul thereof
Than we had never sworn. I swear no more.
I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.
For once - ev'n to the height - I honour'd him. (650-657)

He goes on to describe the King:-

"Man, is he man at all?" methought, when first
I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld
That victor of the Pagan throned in hall -
His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
The golden beard that clothes his lips with light -
.....he seem'd to me no man,
But Michael trampling Satan; so I sware,
Being amazed: (658-669)

-
1. For this idea of Tristram's cynicism that is developed here, Tennyson may have drawn on or associated it with Tristram's friendship and pranks with the cynically amusing knight, Sir Dinadan. In Malory Dinadan is Tristram's friend and companion. They joust or desist from jousting playfully, but in mockery of the mechanical jousting which most knights felt they had to indulge, to preserve their honour. Dinadan mocks love also (Book X Chapter LVff.). In fact in Malory, and in most other Arthurian romances Dinadan is the only knight who mocks the institution of chivalry.

Then Tristram finally disregards the vows and shows scepticism towards Arthur:-

The vows !

O ay - the wholesome madness of an hour -
 They served their use, their time; for every knight
 Believed himself a greater than himself,
 And every follower eyed him as a God;
 Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,
 Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,
 And so the realm was made; but then their vows -
 First mainly thro' that sullyng of our Queen -
 Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence
 Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
 Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up from the deep?
 They fail'd to trace him thro' the flesh and blood
 Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord
 To bind them by inviolable vows,
 Which flesh and blood perforce would violate... (669-684)

Thus Tennyson's Idyll is almost entirely of his own devising, with borrowing of a few details from Malory's story of Tristram, such as the way the knight meets his death. But the love-potion, which is the circumstance upon which all the events in the story turn, and which furnishes it with the pathos and comedy, is omitted entirely by Tennyson. With this omission what remains cannot fairly be called the story of Tristram and Iseult at all.

CHAPTER XIII

(1)

The sources of Guinevere

Though Tennyson invents the occasion of Arthur's parting with Guinevere, the main incident in the Idyll, he borrows from Malory its setting at a nunnery and incorporates into it his own modification of the dramatic incident which leads directly to the break-up of the kingdom in the romance, the discovery of Lancelot with Guinevere in her bower. Tennyson also draws on a few minor details in the Morte d'Arthur such as Lancelot's withdrawal with the queen to his castle, and Arthur's belief in prophecies that he soon must fight that battle which will decide his doom, in order to authenticate his own version of the story. He models the conclusion of the Idyll on details given in Malory in which Guinevere's remaining years at the nunnery are described. In surveying Tennyson's borrowings and reworkings here we must bear in mind that it was the final Idyll of his original Arthurian scheme, and was therefore

intended to round off the series.¹ Only later, in the greater framework created in the writing of The Holy Grail, The Coming of Arthur and The Passing of Arthur, was the Idyll subordinated in the scheme.²

The narrative is as follows:-

Guinevere has fled the court and taken sanctuary in a nunnery, because Vivien and Modred have revealed her liason with Lancelot. In the nunnery a young novice, not knowing her identity, tells her that Modred has usurped the realm and joined forces with the heathen at a time when the king is waging war on Lancelot; and all this has happened because of the queen's infidelity. (1-418)

Now Arthur, on his way to battle against Modred, comes to the nunnery and blames the encroaching anarchy upon his wife's behaviour, for her licentious example has been followed by many knights of the Round Table. Though he condemns her severely he hopes God may pardon her sins, assigns certain of his depleted forces to protect her from the approaching conflict, and blesses her before he leaves for the last great battle. (419-601)

Guinevere realises now how great the king really is. In the nunnery she strives to redeem herself by penance and good deeds, and for her saintliness she is made abbess eventually, and dies three years later. (602-692)

For my first example of how Tennyson has built up the Idyll from details in Malory I select the information which furnishes the setting of the action at a nunnery. Guinevere has gone there when she:-

vnderstood that Kyng Arthur was slayn and al the noble knyghtes syre Modred and al the remenaunte, than the quene stale awaye and v ladyes wyth hyr, and soo she wente to almesburys, and there she let make hir self a Nonne...³

1. Though not dealing with a similar incident, William Morris's treatment of Guinevere as heroine in The Defence of Guenevere (1858), is an ingenious and original if not entirely credible attempt to give the queen a vivid personality. Morris also wrote four other Arthurian poems, which are considered in Appendix B, as they have no bearing on Tennyson's themes.

2. For the steps taken by Tennyson to implement his early Arthurian scheme, see Chapter III, 85-98.

3. Book XXI Chapter VII.

This supplies Tennyson's setting for the meeting between Guinevere and Arthur, though he makes the meeting take place before the battle.

My second example illustrates how Tennyson reworks the incident of Modred's discovery of Lancelot with Guinevere in her bower:-

And then they were agreed upon
 a night
 (When the good king should not be
 there) to meet
 And part for ever. Vivien, lurking,
 heard.
 She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale
 they met
 And greeted. Hands in hands, and
 eye to eye,
 Low on the border of her couch they
 sat
 Stammering and staring. It was their
 last hour,
 A madness of farewells.

But as they were to gyder,
 there came sir Agraayne, and syre
 Mordred with twelve knyghtes with
 hem of the round table, and they
 sayd with cryeng voys, Traytour
 knyghte syr launcelot du lake
 now arte thou taken. And thus
 they cryed with a loude voys
 that alle the courte myghte
 here hit, and they all xiiii
 were armed at al poyntes as
 they shold fyghte in a
 bataille.₁

(After killing Colgreuance and
 donning his armour)....
and anone at the fyrst
 buffet he slewe syr
 Agraayne... Also syr
 launcelot wounded syr Mordred
 and he fledde with alle his
 myghte.₂

And Modred brought
 His creatures to the basement of the
 tower
 For testimony; and crying with full
 voice
 'Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at
 last,' aroused
 Lancelot, who rushing onward lionlike
 Leapt on him.

.....and hurl'd him headlong
 and he fell
 Stunn'd, and his creatures took and
 bare him off,
 And all was still.

1. Book XX Chapter III.

2. Book XX Chapter IV.

Allas sayd quene Gueneuer
now are we mescheued bothe..¹.

Then she, 'the end
is come,
And I am shamed for ever;'
(85-110)

Tennyson has simplified Malory by dropping all but Modred, early chosen as the sole male villain of the Arthurian scheme,² and by replacing Agravain by the ubiquitous Vivien as motivator of the incident. Tennyson transforms Malory's warlike scene into one in which the two lovers are left in the silence to reflect on the full implications of their exposure. And as an added irony it is, in fact, their last meeting.

Next I show how in order to authenticate his setting Tennyson reworks details in Malory which result from Guinevere's exposure. After the exposure Lancelot proposes flight to the safety of his castle in Benwick:-

'..... but rise,
And fly to my strong castle overseas:
There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,
There hold thee with my life against the world.'
She answer'd, 'Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
..... Yet rise now, and let us fly,
For I will draw me into sanctuary,
And bide my doom.'
(111... 121)

In the Morte d'Arthur, on the other hand, Lancelot and his followers rescue Guinevere when she is to be burnt at the stake, and then they actually take her to Lancelot's castle (Joyous Garde) for her personal safety.³ Thus Tennyson takes what is a fact in his prose source and

1. Book XX Chapter III.

2. Evident in the scheme of a play or masque written in the early 1830's. See Chapter III, 62.

3. Book XX Chapter VIII. In Malory in the melee at Guinevere's rescue Lancelot unwittingly kills the unarmed Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, brothers of Gawain. Gawain's wish for revenge on Lancelot plays a large part in the conclusion of the Morte d'Arthur, but Tennyson omits it entirely.

and modifies it to be an unacceptable proposition; and in the Idyll the fact is that Guinevere proceeds directly to the nunnery on her exposure, not, as in Malory, after the final battle and Arthur's death or passing.

Tennyson incorporates another of Malory's details in a similar way. In the nunnery Guinevere hears news:-

..... a rumour wildly blown about
Came, that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm,
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: (151-154)

In Malory Modred usurped the throne when the king was besieging Lancelot in Benwick. In the Idyll this is a mere rumour, and is in fact a means of diminishing interest in Lancelot, whom Tennyson drops from the moment his love of Guinevere is exposed. In Malory, on the other hand, Lancelot returns to Britain too late to help Arthur, for the last battle has taken place.

My final example of the use to which Tennyson puts Malory is the closing details in the Idyll. Here he describes Guinevere's holy life in the nunnery:-

So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing.....
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen abbess..... (669-690)

This follows Malory's portrait, where Guinevere:-

....ware whyte clothes and blacke and grete penaunce she toke
as euer dyd synful lady in thys londe, and neuer creature coude
make hyr mery, but lyued in fastynge, prayers and almes dedes,
that al maner of peple meruaylled how vertuously she was chaunged...
and there she was abbesse and rular as reason wolde.....¹

A borrowing from elsewhere in Malory occurs when Tennyson has Arthur
refer to his prophesied doom:-

Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom. (446-447)

This alludes to Merlin's early prediction in Malory of the outcome of
Arthur's begetting Modred on his sister Elayne:-

But ye haue done a thyng late that god is displeasyd with yow....
that shalle destroye yow and all the knyghtes of your realm.....
A said kyng Arthur ye are a merueillous man, but I merueylle moche
of they wordes that I mote dye in bataille.²

Tennyson may have borrowed from another source for the setting of
the Idyll. There is a precedent in Arthurian literature for Guinevere's
flying to a nunnery before the last battle. It occurs in the alliterative
Morte Arthure (Thornton MS.)³ where we are told that Modred, repenting
of his behaviour, sends a letter to Guinevere urging her to fly for

1. Book XXI Chapter VII.
2. Book I Chapter XVIII (improperly numbered Ch XX in Southey's edition).
3. The alliterative Morte Arthure (designated the Thornton MS.) edited by J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps in a privately printed and circulated edition of 75 copies (1847). This should not be confused with Le Morte Arthur (Harleian MS. 2252), also alliterative, but chiefly concerning Lancelot, edited by T. Ponton (Roxburghe Club 1819).

for safety to Ireland:-

Than cho zermys and zee at zorke in hir chambire,
 Gronys fulle gryssely with gretand teres,
 Passes owte of the palesse with alle hir pryce maydenys,
 Towarde chestre in a charre thay chese hir the wayes,
 Dighte hir ewyne for to dye with dule at hir herte;
 Scho kayres to Karelyone, and kawghte hir a vaile,
 Askes thare the habite in the honoure of Criste,
 And all for falsede, and frawde, and fere of hir loverde.¹

It is more likely, however, that Guinevere's flight before the battle is Tennyson's recollection of his own invention 'Arthur and Guinevere's meeting and parting' devised to happen after Modred and Nimue's discovery in the early scenario.²

From Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia comes one small detail in the Idyll, the information that Modred was "leaguings with the heathen."³ Malory confines Modred's allies to dissenting barons and the folk of the land, but in the Historia Modred sends Cheldric (Childeric) to enlist German and other pagan support.⁴

Tennyson may have been helped in his portrayal of Arthur as pure, as distinct from Malory's Arthur who has had many amorous escapades before his meeting with Guinevere, from his recollection of the character of Prince Arthur in the Faerie Queene. Spenser's prince loves no maiden

1. Morte Arthure (Thornton MS.) lines 3912-3919.

2. See Chapter III, 62 for the scenario, and its fourth act for the detail.

3. Guinevere 153.

4. Historia Regum Britanniae, Book XI Chapter III.

before he sees Gloriana¹ (in a dream), and this is obvious also in the way Tennyson's Arthur first speaks of love:

For saving I be join'd
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work... (84-87)

though it is not expressed directly until Guinevere itself, where the king states to his wife:-

For I was ever virgin save for thee. (554)

It is difficult to indicate the scope of Tennyson's invention. Though, as we have seen, details in the Idyll are reworked from Malory and other sources, the wider details are Tennyson's own. While the introduction of the little novice and the meeting of Arthur and Guinevere are more Tennyson's poetic and narrative devices than inventions as such, there are some distinct inventions also. In one of these as Modred returns from maying² he climbs a high wall to spy what he can see. As he spies Guinevere with Enid and Vivien,

1. Faerie Queene Book I Canto IX verse 10 states Prince Arthur's innocence of love before his encounter with the Fairy Queen in his dream. This parallel between Spenser and Tennyson in the conception of Arthur is pointed out by E. Van de Ven-Ten Bonsel in her useful book The Character of King Arthur in English Literature (Amsterdam 1925), p 191.
2. The idea of maying is based upon a famous incident of maying in Malory Book XIX Chapter I.

along comes Lancelot:-

.....and as the gardener's hand
 Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
 So from the high wall and the flowering grove
 Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,
 And cast him as a worm upon the way...
 But, ever after, the small violence done
 Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
 As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
 A little bitter pool about a stone
 On the bare coast. (29....52)

Thus late in his Arthurian cycle does Tennyson supply the reason for
 Modred's hatred of Lancelot.

As a further illustration of Tennyson's invention I give the
 passage in which the novice tells Guinevere the legend of Arthur's
 birth:-

.....that night the bard
 Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
 As wellnight more than man, and rail'd at those
 Who call'd him the false son of Gorlois:
 For there was no man knew from whence he came;
 But after tempest, when the long wave broke
 All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
 There came a day as still as heaven, and then
 They found a naked child upon the sands
 Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea;
 And that was Arthur; and they foster'd him
 Till he by miracle was approv'd King:
 And that his grave should be a mystery
 From all men, like his birth..... (283-296)

This passage is interesting in that it shows how Tennyson sets forth
 an idea tentatively, and later establishes it in his Arthurian canon
 as a fact or distinct happening. The questions raised by this kind
 of development, whether in raising material from the level of conjecture

to that of a factual narrative, or lowering it from fact to that of some conjectural form, are dealt with later in this thesis.

I give as a final example of Tennyson's invention a description in Arthur's meeting with Guinevere. Here Arthur stresses the fact that because of what has transpired everything is irretrievably changed, even if war were averted and they were reconciled:-

For which of us, who might be left, could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vexed with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair. (498-504)

Thus we may consider the Idyll largely Tennyson's own invention, because no meeting between Arthur and Guinevere takes place at this time in Malory or any other Arthurian source. Also Tennyson adds the character of the little novice as a means of revealing Guinevere's inner thoughts and preparing her for Arthur's visit. Certain passages of Malory's Morte d'Arthur have been borrowed to provide the setting of the Idyll at a nunnery, and to show some of the events happening in the realm because of Guinevere's infidelity. A possible but improbable source for the idea of Guinevere's taking sanctuary before the battle is the version of the end of Arthur's reign given in Morte Arthur (Thornton MS.) ed. J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps; and Geoffrey's Historia supplies the scope of Modred's enlistment of forces against Arthur.

(ii)

The two alterations are to make relationships in the Idyll consistent with the final plan. Thus mention that Modred is Arthur's nephew,¹ and the son of Arthur's sister,² is suppressed.

The only notable addition is a line added to the description of Modred's discovery of Lancelot and Guinevere together in her bower.³ The line added tells how it was Vivien, lurking in the shadows, who heard the agreement to meet between the lovers, and how she passed on this information to Modred. It is a telling addition, showing how a conspiracy of evil brings the downfall of Arthur's kingdom.

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1. Guinevere (1859 version) 10-12.
 2. Guinevere (1859 version) 569-570
 3. Guinevere 97.

CHAPTER XIV

(1)

The Sources of The Passing of Arthur

I have traced to their sources only the first 170 lines and the few that close the Idyll. These lines are Tennyson's setting of the Morte d'Arthur of 1842 into his final Arthurian scheme. The sources of the Morte d'Arthur and the decision to incorporate it into the scheme have been treated already.¹

The story of Arthur's passing is put into the mouth of Bedivere, "first made and latest left of all his knights,"² and therefore the only one capable of telling the story in full. But Tennyson borrows considerably from Chapters III and IV of Malory Book XXI, such as the

1. See for the sources, pages 45-57, and for the incorporation of it into the Idylls, page 88.

2. The Passing of Arthur, 2.

occasion when Arthur in his dream is visited by the ghost of Gawain; the king's dejection before the battle, and Bedivere's encouragement; and details in the combat between Arthur and Modred. Tennyson's other borrowings are then noted. The details of the events leading up to the disposal of Excalibur in the mere are:-

Bedivere, now aged, tells others about the last days of King Arthur. While marching westward towards Lyonesse Arthur had become increasingly depressed. Then on the night before the battle he had dreamt that Gawain came to him and warned him that he would pass away to Avalon on the following day. Arthur now became utterly dejected but Bedivere told him to ignore the dream, as Gawain was never serious. Arthur then pushed Modred's forces back into the end of the land and there was a great battle by the sea in which all were killed but Bedivere, Arthur, and Modred. Arthur despaired, but with Bedivere's encouragement he fought and killed Modred, and was himself severely wounded. (1-169)

After this the story of the Morte d'Arthur, how Bedivere eventually disposed of Excalibur, the King's sword, is taken up. The Idyll closes with the addition to the Morte d'Arthur that:-

Bedivere saw Arthur's boat disappearing over the horizon, and the sun of the new year dawned. (441-469)

Firstly Tennyson puts the whole tale into the mouth of Bedivere, the only knight to survive Arthur's death. The idea for Bedivere's telling of the tale is drawn from Malory where we are told that the details of Arthur's burial or voyage to Avalon (from the text it is not plain which) were given to Bedivere:-

For thys tale syr Bediver knyght of the table rounde made it to be wryton.₁

Then he borrows from Malory the dream that comes to Arthur on the evening before the battle:-

Then came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling: 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight' (30-37)

This has its basis in the following passage in the romance:-

So the kynge semed veryly that there came syr Gawayne vnto hym with a nombre of fayre ladyes with hym.... thus moche hath god gyuen me leue for to warne yow of youre deth, for and ye fyghte as to morne with syre Mordred, as ye bothe haue assygned, doubte ye not, ye must be slayne, and the moost party of your peple on bothe partyes, and for the grete grace and goodenes that almyghty Jhesu hath vnto yow... God hath sente me to yow... that in no wyse ye do bataille as to morne, but that ye take a treatyce for a moneth day... for within a monethe shalle come syr launcelot.... and slee sir mordred and alle that euer wylle holde with hym. Thenne syr Gawayne and al the ladyes vaynnysshed.¹

Tennyson's rehandling is seldom seen more clearly than in this borrowing. In Malory Gawain comes to Arthur to give a useful warning to the king, and advice which could have led to victory, had it not been for an unforeseen incident.² Tennyson, however, reworks the dream to show Gawain as a disillusioned ghost suffering a form of purgatory

1. Book XXI Chapter III.

2. In which, after the truce has been declared, an adder stings a knight on the king's side, and so causes him to lift his sword to slay it. The opposing forces interpret this as a sign of belligerence, and set on immediately.

for his earthly crimes. Moreover Tennyson states through the dream that Gawain was killed in "Lancelot's war." In Malory Gawain is twice wounded in the fighting that results over Guinevere's flight to Benwick with Lancelot, but he dies because he is smitten on the same old wound when he lands in Britain with Arthur's forces to wrest the land from Modred. Thus in Malory Gawain's death is only indirectly due to his warring on Lancelot, whereas in Tennyson's version there is no mitigating detail in blaming Lancelot for Gawain's death. And the ghost offers no alternative to the king but the termination of his life in this world, and a voyage to Avalon.

Another borrowing from Malory, is the king's feeling of futility at the end of the great battle, and Bedivere's reassurance:-

'Hearest thou this great voice which shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me? -
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'
Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King!
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.' (139-153)

This expands upon the following details in Malory at this juncture:-

Thenne the kyng loked aboute hym, and thenne was he ware of al hys hoost and of al hys good knyghtes were lefte no moo on lyue but two knyghtes, that one was Syr Lucan de butlere and his broder Syr Bedwere. And they were ful sore wounded. Jhesu mercy sayd the kyng where are al my noble knyghtes becomen. Allas that euer I shold see thys dolefull day, for now sayd Arthur I am come to myn ende.....god spede you wel sayd syr bedwere.¹

As a final example of Tennyson's rehandling I show how the combat between Arthur and Modred is drawn:-

Thenne the kyng gate hys spere in bothe hys handes and ranne toward syr mordred cryeng traytour now is thy deth day come... And there kyng Arthur smote syre Mordred vnder the shelde wyth a foyne of his spere thoroughoute the body more than a fadom. And whan syr Mordred felte that he had hys dethes wounde, he thurst hymself wyth the myght that he had vp to the but of kyng Arthurs spere. And right so he smote his fader Arthur wyth his swerde holden in bothe his handes on the syde of the heed that the swerde persyd the helmet and the brayne panne, and ther wyth all syr mordred fyl starke deed to the erthe.²

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me....
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

(154...169)

Tennyson simplifies Malory's elaborate brutality but with no dramatic loss, and makes Modred strike the first blow, to underline his cowardice.

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1. Book XXI Chapter IV.
 2. Book XXI Chapter IV.

Lastly I note Tennyson's borrowing from the account of the last battle given in Layamon's Brut. As part of the description of the confusion prevailing in this battle Tennyson states:-

For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew. (100-101)

Malory's description, though just as graphic, has no such detail. But in Layamon's account there is the following detail:-

.....that at the last no warrior knew on whom he should smite, and whom he should spare; for no man knew other there, for the quantity of blood!₁

After Modred's death the Morte d'Arthur of 1842 is taken up line for line, notwithstanding the fact that its introductory lines refer, albeit briefly, to the fact that the last battle has already been fought.

In the few lines added to the Morte d'Arthur at the end, Tennyson furnishes for the king in Avalon a reception not dissimilar to that given him in the concluding lines of The Epic into which the Morte d'Arthur was set earlier. In The Epic the unnamed narrator had a dream in which Arthur was welcomed by many people:-

'Arthur is come again: he cannot die.
.....Come again, and thrice as fair;
.....Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more.'
(The Epic 347...351)

1. Layamon's Brut 27484-27489. A similar description of battle in which "at the last man might not know who smote other" occurs earlier, in lines 26785-26786.

In The Passing of Arthur Bedivere hears:-

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars. (457-461)

Though of course in The Epic these lines of the dream merely round off the story on a hopeful note, and show the link in Tennyson's mind between Christ and King Arthur, the invention might have been taken up in The Passing of Arthur as an incident in Arthurian story, where the king is welcomed in Avalon, and the cycle begins again elsewhere. Tennyson also closes his invented year-cycle on a hopeful note:-

And the new sun rose bringing the new year. (469)

Thus Tennyson bases the additions fitting the Morte d'Arthur into the Idylls on details in Malory Book XXI Chapters III and IV, but the details adopted are thoroughly reworked to fit into his own scheme. There is also a borrowing from Layamon's Brut. The close of The Epic devised many years previously as a suitable setting for the Morte d'Arthur may have furnished him with a detail in closing the whole Arthurian series on an optimistic note.

(11)

Additions to The Passing of Arthur

There are two major additions to the Idyll.¹ The first gives Arthur's despair before the battle:-

'For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain,
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou has forgotten me in my death!
Nay - God my Christ - I pass but shall not die.' (22-28)²

This is surely to parallel Arthur with Jesus upon the Cross, in his one moment of human despair.³

The other addition repeats an expression first used by Merlin about the King in The Coming of Arthur.⁴ Bedivere, watching the barge disappear on the horizon, thinks:-

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' (441-445)

and its repetition is clearly a means of rounding off the mystery of Arthur.

1. There is also the addition of a line alluding to Arthur's war with Rome, The Passing of Arthur 68.
2. The complete addition runs to some 21 lines, 6-28.
3. Compare Mark 15:34 and Matt. 27:46.
4. The Coming of Arthur 410.

(iii)

Therefore Malory's Morte d'Arthur provides the episodes which form the bases for four of the Idylls of the King: Gareth and Lynette, Lancelot and Elaine, Pelleas and Ettarre and The Passing of Arthur. It also provides details that are considerably reworked so that they are simplified, reorganised for greater effect, or subordinated in The Coming of Arthur, Balin and Balan, The Holy Grail, and Guinevere. Even in The Last Tournament, which is Tennyson's one complete departure from his sources, there are a few borrowings from Malory. Then a particular edition of Malory's work, entitled The Byrth, Lyfe and Actes of King Arthur (1817) edited with notes by Robert Southey, supplied Tennyson with information which he used for some details in Merlin and Vivien. Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of early Welsh stories entitled the Mabinogion (1838-49) gave Tennyson the story of Geraint for the Idylls of The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid.

For what from a literary point of view may be regarded as Arthurian history, Tennyson used the histories of Nennius, Gildas and Geoffrey of Monmouth in the collection Six Old English Chronicles (1848). If he borrowed from Wace it was from the edition by Le Roux de Lincy (1836-38); and his extensive borrowings from Layamon are from Madden's edition of 1847.

Amongst popular collections of Arthurian romances Tennyson used George Ellis's Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances (1805) fairly extensively, and in one instance he may have gone beyond Ellis

to the direct source, Le Morte Arthure (Harleian MS. 2252), published by the Roxburghe Club in 1819. With respect to other single editions of romances, there are parallels (in Guinevere) with Morte Arthur (Thornton MS.) edited and published by J.O. Halliwell in 1847, and (in The Holy Grail) with the important collection Sir Gawayne published by the Bannatyne Club in 1839.

Amongst modern versions of Arthurian story Tennyson made occasional use of J.T. Knowles's The Story of King Arthur and His Knights (1861).

Cornish histories, notably those of Carew and Borlase, may have contributed to some details in The Coming of Arthur and The Passing of Arthur respectively. Observations in Welsh bardic books, principally Edward Davies' The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids (1809) were used for details in The Coming of Arthur and other Idylls. And undoubtedly the figure of Arthur in Spenser's Faerie Queene helped Tennyson to form his own conception of the magnanimous king.

Lastly I note that throughout the Idylls there is a very wide reference to Malory other than the actual stories treated. This is considered in greater detail in the chapters following. And the Mabinogion, as well as supplying the story for two of the Idylls, was also used for the details of the Forest of Broceliande and the Fountain of Baranton, briefly mentioned in Merlin and Vivien. Tennyson also may have borrowed the opening situation in the tale of Peredur from this translation for the opening of Gareth and Lynette.

These facts support the view that Tennyson's knowledge of the Arthurian was very extensive, and that he had in fact acquainted himself with all the important editions of Arthurian material available to him.

CHAPTER XV

The barbarous and the supernatural

Now that the extent and kind of Tennyson's sources have been traced, I select for further discussion his handling of two of their more interesting aspects, the barbarous and the supernatural (or magical). In common with all legends the Arthurian has an element of both and Tennyson's handling of them shows a variety of omissions, alterations and additions made in the interests of artistic unity, and of shaping the Arthurian episodes into fit and interesting reading for his own times. Also, as we shall see, in dealing with the supernatural he posed and attempted poetical solutions to certain contemporary problems.

Though some of the barbarous partakes also of the supernatural, the two are usually distinct. The barbarous is simply such episodes, incidents and actions common in times past which would not be acceptable on moral or artistic grounds in Tennyson's own time. The supernatural, on the other hand, is that which could not be explained rationally in

the middle ages, and was therefore considered a manifestation of supernatural powers such as gods, giants and fairies, but which with the advent of science and the application of scientific techniques of investigation and classification could either be explained satisfactorily in causal terms, or dismissed as grotesque figments of the human imagination.

First I consider Tennyson's handling of the barbarous. He handles such episodes or incidents in one of two ways, either by omitting them entirely from his narrative or by combining them with it so that the undesirable characteristics found in the original sources are removed. But his attitude to the barbarous did not hinder him from inventing a few barbarous incidents where apposite.

Tennyson's most important omission of the barbarous is fundamental to the whole Arthurian legend. In Malory (and in his sources) early in his reign King Arthur has an incestuous relationship with his sister (Margawse, or Bellicent) from which Modred springs. When late in the reign Modred usurps the throne in Arthur's absence, and tries to force Guinevere into marrying him, he is motivated partly by the shame he feels at his incestuous begetting and illegitimate birth. Merlin had warned Arthur early in the reign that he would have to pay for his sins in the future,¹ and when the time comes Malory for one makes it plain

1. Book I Chapter XI.

that Modred's action is retributive: "And right soo he smote his fader Arthur." Tennyson omitted this version of Modred's origins, and in the first four Idylls composed he adopted the alternative relationship between Arthur and Modred mentioned in Geoffrey of Monmouth, where Arthur is simply Modred's uncle. Later, however, his conception of Arthur developed further, and he devised the king's mysterious and supernatural coming, borne on the ninth wave to the feet of Merlin and Bleys. Following this development the earlier-written references to kinship between Modred (or any other human) and Arthur were, as we have seen, either expunged or denied as opinions held by unworthy people. In place of Modred's retribution bringing the original story to its climax and giving it dramatic point, Tennyson showed Modred's betrayal of Arthur's ideals and his attempting to kill his own liege.

Another important series of omissions, largely on grounds of barbarity, are the alterations Tennyson made to the story of Balin le Sauvage in order to bring it into the almost complete scheme of the Idylls. In Malory Balin, having gained a magic sword by might, is then asked to give it up. When he refuses he is warned that with the weapon he will kill the person whom he loves most, and that he too will perish. Shortly after this warning he encounters the Lady of the Lake, and seemingly without provocation he hacks off her head. Only later do we learn that he has done this because the Lady herself had killed his own mother.

Clearly such a barbarous decapitation made the story difficult for Tennyson to rehandle, especially as he had already developed his own exalted conception of the Lady of the Lake. The various magical elements also made the story difficult to tell. Tennyson omitted these incidents and instead he made Balin's series of misadventures spring from an uncontrollable temper. In replacing the original developments with those of his own, Tennyson also took the opportunity to add important details about the relationship developing between Lancelot and Guinevere, which was mainly inferred in the eleven Idylls he had so far written. This strengthened one of his weakest links in the cycle as a whole.

In reworking the Quest of the Grail Tennyson also omitted barbaric details. For example, in Malory Galahad in turn struck down Lancelot and Gawain while on the Quest. In retelling this story Tennyson omitted this, as it did not accord with the picture of saintliness he developed in Galahad, or power in Lancelot.

Finally Tennyson ignored many incidents in Malory, particularly those leading up to the exposure of Guinevere and Lancelot. Tennyson of course was free to choose what version of the legend he wanted, and to omit whatever he thought unsuitable. But the incidents omitted play an important part in Malory's plan, and prepare the reader for the final cataclysm. I select two of them, the poisoning of Sir Patrise, and the abduction of Guinevere by Meliagrance, to show how the development is brought about.

In the first chain of events Sir Pinel, wishing to dispose of Sir Gawain, at a banquet held by Guinevere poisons some fruit, knowing Gawain's partiality for apples and pears.¹ Unfortunately, however, before Gawain eats the fruit a certain Sir Patrise takes some and dies. Guinevere is blamed for this misfortune. Mador, cousin of Patrise, takes up the cause and accuses Guinevere, while Bors, in lieu of the absent Lancelot, accepts the challenge. Lancelot returns, however, and takes this golden opportunity to fight in disguise for the queen he loves. He vanquishes Mador, and reveals his identity. Then he excuses his conduct in replacing Bors and in fighting in disguise on the grounds that he owes fealty to the king, and thus to the queen also.

This series of incidents is cleverly contrived by the Arthurian romancers to show Lancelot fighting for his lady. It is but the first of many steps leading up to the exposure of Lancelot and Guinevere.

In the second series of adventures Meliagrance, long in love with Guinevere, ambushes the knights guarding her with a superior force, and abducts her to his castle.² On hearing this Lancelot comes immediately to the rescue, but he too is ambushed, and his horse is slain. Undaunted, he proceeds to the castle in a woodman's cart. Cutting his hand on the bars of a window, he enters the castle at night, visits Guinevere, then retires at dawn. In the morning Meliagrance notices blood on Guinevere's

1. Book XVIII Chapters III-VII.

2. Book XIX Chapters I-IX.

bed, and unaware of Lancelot's means of entry, he accuses the wounded knights who were captured with her of adultery. Lancelot then makes his presence known, and agrees to fight Meliagrance within eight days. Meliagrance however, wishing to avoid the day of reckoning, traps Lancelot by a trick, but the great knight gains his release from a lady who loves him. He appears at the proper time for the combat, and kills Meliagrance. Thus in this series of events the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere is developed further, and an actual instance of their illicit passion is described, and made allowable by the great dangers Lancelot has overcome to gain access to her. By omitting such chains of incidents as these or by failing to develop others to replace them Tennyson weakened the development of his own cycle at a place where it needed strengthening.

Thus Tennyson omitted from the Idylls most of the barbarity in his sources. One incident that is not omitted, however, is Lancelot's begetting of Galahad, mentioned as part of Galahad's history in The Holy Grail. In Malory this comes about when a certain Dame Elaine tricks Lancelot into believing she is Guinevere, and so Galahad is begotten.¹ In the Idyll Tennyson naturally omitted the trick, and he modified the rest of the incident by mentioning Lancelot's begetting of Galahad as an opinion held merely by gossips. To offset any doubts there might be of Lancelot's honour, he cleverly exploited the figure

1. Book XI Chapter II. See pages 185-186.

of the noble knight he had already developed throughout the Idylls, to ask in conclusion, "For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?" Thus the poet modified a barbarous detail in Malory to prove Lancelot's innocence rather than his guilt. By taking the trouble to include a difficult detail such as this he gave the subtle impression that he was treating all the Arthurian story, even that which was distasteful. To bowdlerise the legend fully would have been to make it completely untrue to life.

A second example of how Tennyson modified barbarity is to be found in his handling of the exposure of Lancelot and Guinevere. In Malory no less than twelve fully-armed knights, with Agravain and Modred as their leaders, trapped the lovers together. Lancelot was equal to the occasion, however, and killed all save Modred, who only escaped because he "fledde with alle his myghte." Tennyson, in the interests of artistic unity, simplified the barbarity. Vivien warned Modred of the opportunity, and he came to the base of the tower where the lovers were, along with a few lackeys as witnesses. Upon discovery, Lancelot rushed upon Modred and hurled him headlong. Thus the discovery was not protracted, nor did Lancelot demonstrate near superhuman powers in killing off successively thirteen of his assailants.

Finally, Tennyson invented or all but invented three indelicate incidents showing the extent to which Vivien attempted to corrupt

persons at court.¹ She first suggested that Valence's wife had been unfaithful to him, then she accused Sagramore of attempting to seduce a girl, and she mentioned an unsavoury happening to Percivale in a graveyard. Merlin, to whom she told these tales, easily repudiated them, but he was not able to refute her tattle about Lancelot and Guinevere.

To sum up, Tennyson mainly omitted barbarous incidents, but the few retained were modified in some way so that they did not seem offensive or incongruous; and those he added in one place were to show the depths of Vivien's evil. But though Tennyson was free to alter the legend as he saw fit, he followed Malory fairly closely in most episodes, so it was perhaps unfortunate that he omitted treatment of some vital chapters in Malory that led up to the climax of the story. Treatment of such incidents or the addition of those of a similar kind would have helped Tennyson to make his cycle more realistic.

Tennyson's handling of the supernatural is more complicated. First I consider his omissions, then his inclusions, and finally his additions.

There is a whole series of omissions of the supernatural (or magical) running throughout the Idylls. This is not a development Tennyson initiated, for Malory himself omitted or subordinated much

1. For a more detailed examination of these stories and their probable sources see Chapter VIII, pp 164-165.

of the supernatural he found in his sources.¹ However Tennyson's treatment of the supernatural found in Malory and in other sources was utterly consistent, and this consistency led him to alter radically some important parts of the Arthurian story, as we shall see.

Tennyson's first important omission of the supernatural occurs in the famous episode in which King Uther, through Merlin's enchantments, gains access to Igerne in the guise of her husband Gorlois, and begets Arthur. As I have indicated earlier, Tennyson gave this as one of several accounts of Arthur's origins, and but a shadow of the truth at that.² In doing so he omitted Uther's magical change of shape. In the Idyll, therefore, no deception is practised on Igerne; Uther gains access to her in his own person; and Merlin does not employ his magical powers in order that the King may sate his lust. The wizard's supernatural powers are restricted to the ethical purpose of setting up Arthur's kingdom and building his "havens, ships, and halls."

Another early episode Tennyson omitted for reasons of artistic unity is that in which Arthur becomes king by pulling a sword from a stone. In taking up the last part of the legend first when he composed the Morte d'Arthur, Tennyson had already devised Arthur's

1. See The Works of Sir Thomas Malory ed. E. Vinaver (1954) Vol. III, 1276; and Vinaver's chapter on Malory in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages ed. R.S. Loomis (1956), 546.

2. See Bedivere's account to Leodogran of Arthur's coming, page 109.

gaining of the sword Excalibur from a hand coming out of the mere, and so the introduction of another account of another sword would confuse the reader, and render far less effective the account already successfully created. Moreover Tennyson wanted to show Arthur achieving results for himself with only the discreet aid of magic. If the king is to be a real hero he must establish himself by his own efforts and in battle, and only incidentally must he rely on aid where supernatural powers intervene.

Then in Gareth and Lynette Tennyson treated only the first half of Malory's book of Beaumayns. He naturally eradicated some events, such as Lynette's magical skill by which she put together a knight whom Gareth had hacked to pieces.¹

Following this, in the two Idylls based on the Welsh story of Geraint, Tennyson also cut out all the magic, such as the fantastic Little King and the magic games in the mist. In place of these wonders Tennyson reintroduced Edryn, the villain of the first part of the tale, but so changed by the example set him at Arthur's court and his own efforts, that he is turned into the epitome of chivalry.²

Similarly in Pelleas and Ettarre Tennyson left out all the enchantments which made the story end happily. In Malory Nimue first

1. For a fuller discussion of these omissions and alterations, see page 124.

2. These alterations and omissions are discussed at greater length in pages 141-143.

by enchantment cured Pelleas of his love for Ettarre, and then she enchanted Ettarre so that she fell in love with Pelleas, and died of a broken heart. All ended happily because Nimue married Pelleas. Tennyson replaced these supernatural events with a series of his own inventions showing the steadily declining standard of morals in Arthur's court now that the Grail quest had ended disastrously. Thus after his discovery of Gawain's treachery Pelleas met Percivale, who suggested that the corruption throughout the land was due to the conduct of Lancelot and Guinevere. Then on his way back to Camelot Pelleas encountered Lancelot, and because of the scandal he had heard and his own predicament, he challenged the great knight to combat, and was quickly overcome. When the two knights entered the great hall together Pelleas failed to give the queen the customary courtesy, and everyone knew some terrible incident had just happened, and that another was not far off.

Though in the stories Tennyson selected, the magical element is so far peripheral, this is not so with that of Tristram and Iseult. Tennyson included a form of the story in The Last Tournament, but, as in other stories with a magical element, he omitted the supernatural. In Malory the most important element, the magic potion, though mentioned briefly, holds the lovers spellbound to one another. In the Idyll there is no mention of the potion, and Tristram's relations with Iseult of Ireland and Iseult of Brittany presents him as an opportunistic philanderer. This is a travesty of the great medieval story which depends upon the spell for all its pathos and humour -

a spell so potent that in one version of the legend if the lovers are parted but for a day they grow sick, and if separated for as long as a week they must die. In every other case Tennyson's omission of the supernatural is justified on grounds of artistic unity, morality, or the like. But in the story of Tristram the magic drink is the impelling motif, and to omit it is to destroy the story. Tennyson would have been better to have omitted the story entirely.

I now come to the supernatural in Malory that Tennyson retained in the Idylls. That which he retained (and extended) followed a simple pattern from the first supernatural incident he took up. As we have seen, it was that in which Arthur received the sword Excalibur from the mere early in his reign, and the developments following which brought this incident to its conclusion. Though Malory shows Arthur receiving the sword from the mere, when the time comes for its return the King has it thrown into the sea. But, as I have already shown earlier, Tennyson made the story more consistent at this point when he had the sword thrown back to the very mere from which it was first received.¹ This systematising of the Arthurian legend and its implications have been clearly expressed by Eugene Vinaver in respect of this same incident:-

1. See pages 54-56 for a detailed account of this point.

In a long and fierce combat Arthur breaks his sword against that of his opponent (Pellinore), but Merlin's timely appearance saves him. A sword worthy of the young king must now be found, and it must be strong enough to serve him all his life. The circumstances in which Arthur and Merlin discover the good sword are clearly intended to serve as a preparation for the concluding scene of the battle of Salisbury Plain. Arthur and Merlin come to a lake and see in the middle of it a hand holding a sword..... When the time comes to complete the magic circle, the same hand will receive the sword from the dying king, and the sword will thus return to the enchanted place from which it came. Once extended into a consistent design with an appearance of logical sequence, the supernatural incident becomes acceptable even to the rationally-minded: the sense of symmetry suffices to justify its presence.¹

Vinaver goes on to show that this particular systematisation reached its logical conclusion in the Morte Artu, a late medieval romance, where the sword is returned to the mere. Tennyson of course devised his variant independently from the romance (the Morte Artu was not edited and published until 1909-1910), but he only introduced the supernatural into the Idylls where "the sense of symmetry suffices to justify its presence."

There is one other supernatural detail that Tennyson retained. It is Lancelot's upbringing by the Lady of the Lake.² Tennyson introduced this information incidentally as Lancelot soliloquized over Elaine's death and his own sinful love for Guinevere:

Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms -
She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son," and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.³

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1. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory III, 1269-1270.
 2. Not recorded in Malory, but in Ellis's Specimens. See page 175.
 3. Lancelot and Elaine. 1393-1400.

It is, however, more an expression of Lancelot's own confusion and moral bewilderment than of the supernatural as such, for he is thrown back on his own mysterious past. But it does establish Arthur's foremost knight as the nearest to the king, in a sense, in that they both have something of the supernatural connected with their origins.

Finally I wish to consider as briefly as possible the extent of Tennyson's invented additions of the supernatural. Most of these additions are organised in the same manner as the supernatural Tennyson retained, in other words they follow a systematic and symmetrical pattern. They are introduced at the beginning of the reign, and are developments making the beginning similar in its circumstances to the end, or the end to the beginning.

First there is Tennyson's own version of Arthur's coming, given as the only authentic account of Arthur's origins in The Coming of Arthur. In this account Merlin and Bleys, walking Tintagel shore on the midnight of New Year's Eve, see a fiery ship momentarily on the horizon; and shortly after this the baby Arthur is borne to their feet on the enormous ninth wave. I think the innovation is based on the circumstances in which in one of Malory's versions Arthur closes his earthly life. He does not die, but passes instead to Avalon to be healed of his wounds. If he cannot die, it is only consistent that he cannot be born either, but comes into the world as mysteriously as he departs from it.

Other supernatural additions also form a symmetry. Thus in Malory and Tennyson at Arthur's passing he is received in the funeral barge by three fair queens.¹ Tennyson introduced these three queens first at the beginning of Arthur's reign, at his coronation.

Completely invented (as distinct from extended) incidents which are introduced into the symmetry are when Arthur goes forward to his important battle. Then his special qualities are emphasized, for he is able to see:

The smallest rock far on the faintest hill
And even in high day the morning star.²

Later, during the battle:

.....the Powers that walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him
And dazed all eyes....³

By such additions Tennyson stressed the spiritual nature of his hero from the first.

The only other supernatural event occurring in the Idylls is the appearance of the Grail, and the events that mark and follow its appearance. Tennyson showed great skill in introducing the Grail, for there is no symmetry to sustain its introduction, and

1. For this event, see page 48.

2. The Coming of Arthur 98-99.

3. The Coming of Arthur 106-108.

he had to introduce it in such a way that it did not provoke the sceptic to dismiss it as unreal or the man of faith to reject it as explicable.

First, the various accounts given of the Grail are deliberately put into the mouth of a sceptical character whose outlook blinds him to all but a momentary vision of the Grail. If such a sceptic is persuaded, then the account he gives of the Grail's appearance is all the more credible to us. Then most of the description of the Grail is naturalistic. Even so, it could be merely a will o' the wisp. But faith is a necessary prerequisite to seeing the Holy Vessel. Therefore it is such a personal experience in Tennyson's interpretation, that it cannot be assailed as unscientific. I select one example of how Tennyson manages the difficulties inherent in presenting the Grail as a spiritual force and how he overcomes them. It is when Percivale describes Bors' release. Bors, having been thrown in prison by pagans, gains his release through some events taking place close upon one another. Whether they are in fact related or not is left to the reader's interpretation.

First, when Bors was imprisoned:

..... and lying bounded there
In darkness thro' innumerable hours
He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep
Over him, till by miracle - what else? -
Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,
Such as no wind could move:

Shortly after this the Grail itself appeared to him:

"In colour like the fingers of a hand
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
Glided and past, and close upon it peal'd
A sharp quick thunder." Afterwards, a maid,
Who kept our holy faith among her kin
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go.

The first event leading to Bors' release was that a stone of the prison wall slipped and fell. Then the Grail itself appeared to the prisoner. Shortly after this a girl came and released him from his chains.

Any number of reasons could be produced to show how the stone slipped and fell. The only part of the account, in fact, which cannot be considered natural is the appearance of the Grail itself. But if we take these events leading to Bors' release as a whole (they are presented as a whole), they are part of some system, but not a causal system. Thus a sceptic cannot pick holes in it, and the man of faith accepts it as a miracle.

Thus Tennyson devised supernatural effects in several ways. He took events not in themselves supernatural, and combined them in some manner so that they appeared wonderful; he stressed ordinary mortal powers normally taken for granted but which if viewed from one point of view are amazing; and he organised events into systems, but not causal systems. These were the only ways it was open for him to present and reaffirm the spiritual effectively in an age of logic militant, when the attempt was constantly made to press everything into the compass of logical inspection and predication.

In handling the supernatural in these ways Tennyson omitted it when it merely diverted attention from his main figure of Arthur. In fact the great King is the only person who has supernatural or spiritual powers in Tennyson's cycle. Even Merlin's magic powers are inferred rather than stated. The supernatural retained appears acceptable because it is organised into a symmetry, and seems inevitable; or it is presented naturalistically and often in some form which cannot be criticised from a scientific standpoint. The little of the supernatural Tennyson added fits into the symmetry.

CHAPTER XVI

Other Aspects of Tennyson's Use of Sources

Now that I have indicated the kind and extent of Tennyson's Arthurian sources, the specific uses to which he puts them in each of the Idylls, and his rehandling of two of their more difficult aspects, I wish to show very briefly the range of his borrowings, his rearrangements in the order in which the stories are told, similarities in his narrative method, and the increasing freedom towards his sources he develops nearing the completion of his cycle.

As we have seen, Tennyson's borrowing is enormous in its variety. Few identical cases can in fact be found. However for the sake of convenience I have separated them into one or two groups. Even such an arbitrary classification shows the great technical skill always at his command, and the inspired and yet practical inventiveness which enabled him to revitalise the legends.

Tennyson's closest borrowings, almost word for word from Malory (or other sources), are comparatively few, and they occur only when the

original material is graphic in event and presentation. Borrowings of this kind are, for example, the dialogue between Gareth and Lynette;¹ the list of battles (from Nennius) Lancelot tells Elaine that Arthur and himself have fought;² and Bedivere's disposing of Excalibur in the mere, followed by Arthur's reception on the funeral barge bound for Avalon.³

Then there is a vast range of borrowing in which the story is made vivid by the omission, reorganisation or addition of minor details. Examples of this subtle alteration are in the record of kings Arthur fights in order to pacify his realm;⁴ the adversaries Geraint defeats in the wilderness before he comes upon Limours;⁵ and Pelleas coming upon Gawain and Ettarre in a pavilion within her castle.⁶

Examples of a more radical reorganisation are Tennyson's rehandling of the series of combats Gareth has before he wins Lynette;⁷ and in many series of events in the Quest of the Grail.⁸

1. See pages 126-127.
2. See pages 176-177.
3. See pages 45-49.
4. The Coming of Arthur 111-115, taken from Malory Book I Chapter XII.
5. Geraint and Enid 55-59, 118-129, 142-185 and Mabinogion II, 106-112.
6. See page 199.
7. See pages 127-129.
8. See Chapter X, particularly pages 188, 190, 192.

Then there is the borrowing of places into which a partly or wholly invented story or incident is set. For example, Tennyson places the largely invented account of Merlin's seduction by Vivien in the Forest of Broceliande;¹ and the invented last meeting between Arthur and Guinevere is located at the nunnery to which she flies.² As well as borrowing places, Tennyson takes up minor characters and makes them play far more important roles than they have as they appear in the legends and chronicles. Examples of this are the characters of Leodogran, Bellicent and Bedivere, used to reveal Arthur's origins,³ or of Percivale, in order to tell in a certain way and from a certain viewpoint the story of the Grail Quest.⁴

Then Tennyson takes up the insignificant reactions of characters on various very particular occasions, and makes these reactions the basis for the complete behaviour of the characters. Tennyson draws Percivale and Bors on these lines,⁵ as he does to a lesser extent Modred and Gawain.⁶ In a similar way insignificant details are adopted

1. See page 163, footnote 1.

2. See page 211.

3. See pages 107-109, 111 and 121. The minor figures of Ulfius and Brastias are also borrowed.

4. See page 183.

5. See pages 188, 190-191.

6. See for example pages 119, 209, 219.

and expanded into powerful symbolic devices charged with significance. The use Tennyson makes of the faded dress worn by Enid when Geraint first sees her, and the diamond jousts, as relocated and expanded in a variety of forms in the story of Elaine,¹ are cases in point.

Other interesting adaptations are the alteration of fact into fiction. Tennyson used this as a means of reducing disagreeable or incongruous material, such as we have seen in the cases of Arthur's begetting by Uther and Lancelot's begetting of Galahad, considered in the previous chapter.²

Finally I note a few of Tennyson's more important inventions. Foremost there is Arthur's coming, borne to the feet of Merlin and Bleys below Tintagil on the stormy midnight of New Year's Eve;³ the start of Modred's deceit and the reasons for his hatred of Lancelot; Lancelot and Guinevere falling in love one fateful day in May as he escorts her to the king;⁴ and the infamous last tournament, held on a wet and blustering autumn day, as the last flickerings of chivalry expire.

1. See pages 172-173

2. See pages 238-239

3. An account of this invention is given on page 120.

4. Given on many occasions in the Idylls. See chiefly pages 121 and 165.

Now I wish to pass to the question of Tennyson's relocation of the stories he selected from Malory, so that each one becomes an integral part of his moral cycle.¹ Amongst the more interesting relocations Tennyson makes the Gareth story (not occurring till Malory Book VII) the first in his series of adventures, while Merlin is still alive. The story of Pelleas which originally preceeded it, he makes into one late in his cycle to show the growth of evil. He transposes the Grail Quest and the story of Elaine to show the reasons behind Lancelot's failure to see the Grail. And he takes such as he borrows from the story of Tristram out of its central setting in Malory to show the final degradation at court, long after the failure of the Grail Quest.

From this extensive reorganisation I pass on to consider some of the ways in which Tennyson suggests a unity throughout the Idylls. The most important of these is that in each Idyll he does not confine himself simply to the story he is telling. In order to make each Idyll self-subsistent, and to fit it into his moral scheme, he refers to far more than the story itself. The story is motivated by or has as its result some situation taken out of the wider Arthurian picture.

This is true of The Coming of Arthur, in which Tennyson refers to a great deal more than Arthur's coming, his coronation and his marriage,

1. As has recently been discovered, Malory himself did not write his stories in narrative order, and may not have intended their publication as a continuous tale. This was Carton's work. (See The Works of Sir Thomas Malory ed. E. Vinaver (1949) Introduction XXIX-XXXV). But I have taken it in Carton's order as that is the way it has been presented for centuries, and the form in which Tennyson always knew it.

all of which are found in a very few chapters of Malory's first book. Reference is also made, when Arthur receives Excalibur, to the time still far distant when he must return it to the place from whence it came. There is also mention of his war with Rome and of the twelve great battles against the Saxons, both series of events taking place long after his coronation. This width of reference is continued in Gareth and Lynette far beyond the actual story of how Gareth defeats his opponents. There is also mention of Arthur dispensing justice, and his repulsing Mark's emissary, an event that has fateful consequences as it leads eventually to Vivien's journey to Camelot. This wider reference is found to a greater or less degree in each Idyll, making each an Arthurian world in little. An exception is The Holy Grail, but this Idyll is itself a recombination of many events scattered throughout several books in Malory.

There are various other devices which gives the illusion of unity throughout the Idylls. The best known is Tennyson's devising a year-cycle to stress in a natural way the growth, fruition and decay of Arthur's kingdom. Arthur comes into the human world on the midnight of the New Year; he marries in May and overcomes the heathen. The Grail appears in early autumn. In late autumn the last tournament is held. Guinevere takes sanctuary in the nunnery on a freezing and misty November day. Arthur is borne to Avalon in the dying moments of the year.

Another means of unifying the Idylls is Tennyson's play upon certain nodal points of foci of interest from which all the important developments spring. Examples of these are the spiritual origins of the king and its popular interpretation; the origins of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere; and the glimpses of Modred given from his boyhood to his death in combat against Arthur.

Then there is a network of dreams, visions, trances, and other sub- or hyper-conscious states running throughout the series, and this helps to give them a feeling of unity.

As another unifying device Tennyson repeats epithets in different Idylls. And he consciously introduces archaism in grammar, idiom, spelling and the like, which, combined with his habitual use of periphrasis and circumlocution, create an archaic, epical and not unmedieval tone. Examples of these devices can be seen on any pages of the Idylls.

Lastly I wish to show what developments there are in Tennyson's handling of his sources. No consistent development can be found in this until late in the cycle. He treated his Arthurian sources freely from the very first, for example in The Lady of Shalott, in devising Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, and in adding to and perfecting the Morte d'Arthur. Then the first Idyll written, Merlin and Vivien, is one of the freest in its use of sources. In fact there is so little substance to the original tale - merely the application of the spell - that the poet is free to decorate the idea as he wishes. In the stories

following that have greater substance to them, he generally keeps to the story, if we ignore the alterations to some of their conclusions in order to bind them into the moral cycle, and to remove the extrinsic barbarity and magic.¹ But in the last two Idylls written, The Last Tournament and Balin and Balan, the radical alterations were to a great extent forced on him by the form he adopted from the start, and by the necessity to accommodate these stories to his almost completed scheme.

Despite Tennyson's many and deliberate efforts to make the stories fit together into a narrative scheme, the Idylls are better regarded as a very loose and irregular series than as a highly worked sequence. I showed how Tennyson's plans changed considerably during the writing of the Idylls in Chapter III.² As we have seen, the conception of Arthur developed to some extent also during the writing. The stories themselves were not written in narrative order. As an outcome of this, some are highly allegorical while others have little or no allegory.

I think the only way to contend with these many difficulties is to consider the Idylls as separate episodes illustrating the great story of King Arthur. They can only be regarded as united contingently in one large work.

1. See pages 241-244.

2. See pages 101-103.

CHAPTER XVII

Conclusion

In summing up the work of the previous chapters we can make the following three points. First, Tennyson possessed an extensive knowledge of the Arthurian legend in all the forms in which it was available. Secondly, he showed great skill and invention in working with it. Thirdly, because of his knowledge, skill and powers of invention he was able to recreate the legends according to the manners and morals of his times without sacrificing their original vitality.

It is obvious Tennyson acquainted himself with everything available about the Arthurian legends. This is shown by his lifelong interest in Arthurian publications, and by the great variety of sources he used.

He selected skilfully from this very various and often inconsistent or contradictory material and invented suitable persons and situations in order to create an artistic consistency. The world of King Arthur so presented in his poetry, particularly the

Idylls of the King, is neither as barbarous as that in the Arthurian chronicles, nor as fanciful as that in the metrical and prose romances. His skill is shown particularly in his incorporation of elements from Gildas, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Layamon, and Welsh bardic traditions, and in the multiple uses to which he puts Malory in order to provide incidents and characters to motivate the stories selected, and to link the poems together.

But all the skill in the world would not have made the tales so woven together effective, unless Tennyson had used them as a means of dealing with the problems of his times. He does this, so that central to our understanding of the Idylls is his expression of the spiritual, unprovable by the simple means at our disposal, as that alone which gives dimension to man. King Arthur in chronicle and history had been a great leader, and magnanimous king. In Tennyson's conception the king is foremost a spiritual leader, and according to his view society only holds together properly insofar as it accepts the constant challenge to live according to a spiritual outlook, in a world of disintegrating forces of materialism and merely concerned with the arbitrary manipulation of petty concepts.

Though because of the way Tennyson planned and carried out the composition of the Idylls they are not successful on all levels, the attempt and the achievement are magnificent. The theme and its execution, with but one exception (*Tristram*), were treated with the greatest integrity; and we may read it either for the poetic spirit

which alone opens to man unpredictable and unassessable possibilities, or for word portraiture as fine as any in the English language. It is one of the considerable poetic achievements of the nineteenth century.

Appendix A

The more important editions of Arthurian material published in England between 1750-1875.

I list the principal editions of Arthurian chronicles, metrical and prose romances, histories and critical essays produced during the revival of interest in legendry other than classical during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The appendix aims merely to select those works published during this time that were likely to have been used by writers reverting to the theme.

Critical Works leading to renewed attention to the Arthurian:

Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser (1754) draws attention to Malory. It was corrected and enlarged in 1762, where attention to Malory is omitted.

Letters on Chivalry and Romance by Robert Hurd (1762) is a critical work of singular originality. It calls for a fairer appraisal of the Gothic on its own terms, and not on criteria established by classical literature.

The systematic collection of ballads, including Arthurian ballads, in Bishop Percy's Reliques of English Poetry (1765), reissued many times during the century and the next.

The Life of King Arthur by Joseph Ritson (1825) attempts to establish the historical and legendary regions of Arthur's rule. Unfortunately Ritson's often true and honest critical appraisals (he was one of the first who attempted to put criticism on a scientific footing) are vitiated by his hatred of minor inaccuracies in the works of others. In this history, for example, a disproportionate amount of space is occupied by belabouring Geoffrey of Monmouth and those who set store on his fancies.

Chronicles:

Nennius's Historia Brittonum (with an English translation) edited by T. Gunn (London, 1819). Further editions appeared in 1838 and 1841. Then there was an edition of Nennius and Gildas by San Marte (Berlin, 1844) and both chronicles also appeared in the collection Six Old English Chronicles (London, 1848).

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae was published in London (1718). Then it appeared in Welsh, along with an English translation, in Vol. II of The Cambrian Register (1796). It was edited by Giles (London, 1844) and reappeared as one of Six Old English Chronicles (1844). San Marte produced an edition also (Halle, 1854). Geoffrey's Vita Merlini (part of the Historia) was edited by Michel and Wright and published (Paris, 1837).

Wace's Brut was first edited and published by Le Roux de Lincy (Rouen 1836-38).

Layamon's Brut first appeared edited by Sir F. Madden (London, 1847).

The History and Chronicles of Scotland (accredited to Hector Boece) and in the translation by John Bellenden was reprinted in 1821. Book VIII XIX to Book IX Chapter XII concerns King Arthur.

Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle (1724 ?) edited by Thomas Hearne was republished in 1810 and Volume I 156-224 concerns King Arthur.

The Chronicle of the Kings of Britain (a translation from the Welsh Brut attributed to Tysilio) by Peter Roberts (1811) contains several references to Arthur in chronicle and romance.

Editions of Malory:

The History of the Renowned Prince Arthur (editor anonymous), speedily prepared to beat other republications of Malory, appeared under the imprint of the publishers Walker and Edwards (2 vols, London, 1816). It is a convenient pocket edition with modern spelling, but little care in punctuation.

A second publication of Malory appeared soon after the pocket edition. The printer was R. Wilks, and the editing is attributed to Joseph Haslewood. This text is no more accurate than its predecessor.

The Byrth, Lyf and Actes of Kyng Arthur was mainly edited and supplied with notes by Robert Southey, and appeared in black letter and with the form of the Stansby edition (2 vols, 1817).

Malory's Morte d'Arthur edited by Thomas Wright appeared in 1858. It has a pleasing format and provides some rather poor notes.

Romance collections:

Reliques of English Poetry (1765) by Thomas Percy. There were four more editions before the end of the century, and the work was reprinted frequently in the following century also. Five ballads concern the Arthurian legend: "The Boy and the Mantle;" "The Marriage of Sir Gawaine;" "King Ryence's Challenge;" "King Arthur's Death" (a fragment). In addition in Appendix II of the Reliques Percy, in an essay on the ancient metrical romances, gives a summary of Libius Disconius (sic), and lists 39 metrical romances, all he knew were extant in his own times.

Ancient English Metrical Romances (1802), edited and compiled by Joseph Ritson. Of the twelve metrical romances printed, the first three: Ywaine and Gawin; Launfal; and Libeaus Disconus are Arthurian; and in the comprehensive notes to each legend, full accounts are given in Ywaine and Gawin of Arthur, Guinevere, Modred, and Kay. In the notes to Launfal, Percival, Lancelot and Merlin are discussed; and the Round Table in Libeaus Disconus.

Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances (1805) by George Ellis. The romances are divided into six groups, of which the first is Arthurian, and in this section Ellis gives examples from Merlin and the metrical Morte Arthur (Harleian Ms. 2252), really an account of the adventures of Lancelot. He also provides summaries of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia and that apocryphal part of it entitled Vita Merlini, and the plots of such Lais of Marie de France as had not been previously translated into English.

The translation of Le Grand's Fabliaux by G.L. Way (1815) contains the following stories of Arthur's court: Vol. I: The Mantle Made Amiss, and The Mule without a Bridle. In copious notes to these two tales, Arthur and his court are discussed, and parallels drawn between the French and Welsh traditions of Arthur. Vol II contains The Knight and the Sword, The Vale of False Lovers, The Lay of Sir Lanval, and The lay of Sir Gueumer. Vol III presents as part of the appendix the story of Sir Tristram quoted and translated from Tristran de Leoncois, and the whole of Launfal Miles is printed in original.

The History of Fiction (1816) by J.C. Dunlop, is an important handbook to romance and legendry. It surveys most of the "fiction" or legendary tales of chivalry. Dunlop's manner of narrative is akin to Ellis in its concision and irony. Vol III gives abstracts of Merlin, the St. Graal or Sangreal, Perceval, Lancelot du Lak, Meliadus or Leonnoys, Tristan, Ysaie le Triste, Arthur, Gyron le Courtois, Perceforest, Artus de la Bretagne and Cleriadus.

Sir Gawayne (A collection of ancient Romance-Poems by Scottish and English Authors, relating to the celebrated Knight of the Round Table) edited by Sir Frederick Madden for the Abbotsford Club (1839). This contains the first publication of Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight, and seven other works on Gawain.

Three Early English Metrical Romances edited by John Robson (1842) contains The Awntyrs of Arthure at the Tarne Wathelynge, and also the previously unpublished The Avowyng of King Arther, Sir Gawin, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdewyn of Breten."

The Thornton Romances, the early English romances of Perceval, Isumbras, Eglamour and Degrevant was published for the Camden Society (1844).

Separate Romances:

Sir Triestre edited and completed by Sir Walter Scott (1804)

Le Morte Arthur subtitled The Adventures of Sir Launcelot du Lake, edited by T. Ponton for the Roxburghe Club (1819). It was edited and republished by F.J. Furnivall for the Early English Text Society in 1864.

Arthour and Merlin, a Scottish metrical romance published for the Abbotsford Club (Edinburgh 1838)

Lancelot du Lak, a Scottish metrical romance, published for the Maitland Club (Edinburgh 1839).

The Seynt Graal or The Bank Ryal subtitled The History of the Holy Grail, edited by F.J. Furnivall for the Roxburghe Club (2 volumes 1861, 1863).

La Queste del Saint Graal edited by Furnivall for the Roxburghe Club in 1864.

There are the following publications of the Early English Text Society:

Arthur: a short Sketch of his Life and History in Early English Verse of the first half of the XV Century, edited by F.J. Furnivall, (1864).

Sir Cawayne and the Green Knight edited by R. Morris (1865)

Lancelot of the Laik edited by W.W. Skeat (1865)

Morte Arthure edited by E. Brook (1865)

Merlin (part I) edited by H.W. Wheatley (1865)

Merlin (part II) edited by H.W. Wheatley (1866)

Merlin (Part III) with an essay on "Arthurian Localities" by J.S. Stuart Glennie, and edited by H.W. Wheatley, (1869).

Lonelich's History of the Holy Grail edited by F.J. Furnivall (I, 1874 and II, 1875).

Welsh Arthurian traditions:

The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids (1809) by Edward Davies, gives what was considered in its time to be an authoritative and comprehensive account of bardism.

Iolo Manuscripts, A Selection of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts (Welsh MS. Society, 1848) contains innumerable references to Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in chronicles and poems in Welsh.

The literature of the Kymry (1849) by T. Stephens gives an informative account of Welsh literature from its beginnings.

Taliesin (1858) by D.W. Nash, is sharply critical of many ancient Welsh traditions and their modern interpretation, but stresses the fact that some of the traditions are ancient.

Appendix B

References to King Arthur and the other figures of the
Arthurian legend in English poetry and drama from 1700-1870.

Though there are adequate studies of the Arthurian legend as it appears in Spenser and in the writers of the XVII Century, there are none for the various writers who revert to it during the XVIII and XIX Centuries. Therefore I have compiled this appendix, in order to give some indication of the use to which the Arthurian was put during this time.

Though I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible, there are bound to be many omissions in attempting to cover such a large field; and this compilation is merely a guide to the changing tastes of the era.

In A Fairy Tale in the Ancient English Style published in Poems on Several Occasions (1722), Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) uses an Arthurian reference to invoke the fairies: "In Britain's Isle and Arthur's days/When Midnight Faeries daunc'd the Maze."

Tom Thumb, A Tragedy (1730) revised as The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great (1737) gives Henry Fielding (1707-1754) plenty of opportunity in coarse satire to cut to pieces theatrical pretension of his time. King Arthur is depicted as "a passionate sort of king, husband to Queen Dollalolla, of whom he stands a little in fear; Father to Huncamunca, whom he is very fond of; and in love with Glumdalanca." Merlin appears as "a conjuror, and in some sort Father to Tom Thumb." Queen Dollalolla is "wife to King Arthur and mother to Huncamunca; a woman entirely faultless, saving that she is a little given to drink; a little too much a virago towards her husband, and in love with Tom Thumb."

Merlin, or The Devil of Stone-Henge, an Entertainment (1734) is an anonymous libretto. In it Merlin appears as an infernal spirit; while he was alive he was an enchanter.

Merlin, or The British Inchanter and King Arthur, the British Worthy, an opera "altered" from Dryden's King Arthur by a Mr. Giffard, was performed and published in 1736.

The Institution of the Order of the Garter (1742) was written by Gilbert West (1703-1756) as a masque or pageant in which the Song of the Bards invokes Arthur, his battle at Badon, his institution of the Round Table, and Edward I's wisdom in resuscitating him.

The Bard (1757) of Thomas Gray refers to Arthur (III.i.109), "No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail/All-hail, ye genuine Kings, Britannia's Issue, hail!" Further references to Arthur in Gray's MSS. of poems are to be found in the Wharton and Mason MSS published in Gray and Collins (Oxford 19), p

Arthur, Monarch of the Britons, A Tragedy (finished November 29, 1759, but not published until the Poetical Works (1775); composed by William Hilton (fl.1770). It is a free and imaginative handling of Arthurian story, containing for example in Act V Scene V Guinevere's begging and gaining forgiveness from Arthur after Modred's death.

There are references to King Arthur in A Night Piece (circa 1760) of W.J. Mickle (1734-1788). Also his ballad imitation Hengist and May opens with an Arthurian setting, probably in imitation of Parnell.

On the Birth of the Prince of Wales (1762) by Thomas Warton (1728-1790) reflects on the Tudor claims and the use of the Arthurian legend's popularity to enlist support from the Welsh.

In Antony's Tale of Crazy Tales (1765) by John Hall-Stevenson (1718-1785) fun is made of Arthur and his worthies.

In a masque written in 1771 based on Gilbert West's poem on The Institution of the Garter (1742), David Garrick, though cutting out references to King Arthur, states in his preface the increasing interest in pageantry: "The eager and almost universal Curiosity, which the later Installation of the knights of the Order of the Garter excited in the Publick, seemed in a manner to commend our Attention, and justify our Endeavours to exhibit a Representation of it in the following masque."

A Prophecy of Merlin, An Heroic Poem (anon, 1776) uses the bard to hail the success of making the Severn navigable as far as Stroud.

The Grave of King Arthur (1777) by Thomas Warton. See Chapter I, 15.

Ode XIX: On His Majesty's Birthday (1787) emphasizes again Warton's interest in the Arthurian.

Arthur, or The Northern Enchantment (1789) by Richard Hole (1746-1803) For an account of this interesting work see Chapter I, 15-17.

In the poem which gives the book its title, A Tour through Parts of Wales (1794), William Sotheby (1757-1833) refers to "Merlin's mystic verse," Book II, 37. In the poem Llangollen in the same volume Sotheby refers briefly to Arthur.

In the play Cambro-Britons (1798) James Boaden (1762-1839) speaks in Act II Scene IV of "the swelling deeds/Of brave King Arthur and Queen Genevra." In the same scene there is a song about Arthur based on a ballad or imitation of a ballad, in which he has magic powers.

In Alfred (1801) I, 365 and III, 325-336, one of the portentous epics of Henry James Pye (1745-1813) Arthur is mentioned.

Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement (1801) by John Thelwall (1764-1834) contains The Fairy of the Lake (a dramatic romance in three acts) in which the Fairy, or Lady of the Lake, intervenes to save Arthur from the female wiles of the Saxon Rowenna. A note to the poem states: "The Lady of the Lake, according to Cambrian story, was one of the fairy guardians of Arthur.... she was considered by the ancient Cambrians as a benignant spirit. Accordingly she is here represented as a personification of essential purity." (p207).

Scenes of Infancy (1803) by John Leyden (1775-1811) contains references to the legend in I 57-71 and III 505-520.

A sonnet in the volume Lewesdon Hill (1804) by William Crowe (1745-1829) asks: "Ah! where is hid that Orb of glass so bright/That Merlin for King Ryence did contrive?" from Spenser's Faerie Queene III Canto II.

The strangest use of Arthurian legend is found in William Blake's Jerusalem (1804-20), where Gwiniverra (sic) appears in Book I, 555 (Nonesuch edition 1927); Merlin in II, 618 and 656; Gwinivera (sic) III, 693 and Arthur in company with Alfred and Charlemagne, III, 698.

Robert Southey's Madoc (1805) contains three references to the Arthurian, Madoc in Wales III, 216, XI, 105 and XVII, 73.

The Dying Bard (1806), a minor poem of Sir Walter Scott's, contains a reference to Merlin.

In England and Spain (1808) Mrs. Felicia Hemans (1794-1835) refers to "Doubtful Arthur, hero of romance/King of the circled board, the spear, and lance."

The Bridal of Triermain (1813), by Sir Walter Scott. See Chapter I, 17-18.

In the second sonnet prefixed to his translation of Le Grand's Fabliaux (1815) G.L. Way (fl. 1796) speaks of Arthur's immortality and his "deeds embalm'd in Merlin's song."

In Prescience, or The Secrets of Divination (1816) by Edward Smedley (1789-1836), Merlin appears in I, 495.

Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work (1817) by John Hookham-Frere (1769-1846) makes fun of King Arthur. See I, 25-26.

The Prospectus was republished with a second part, and the whole entitled The Monks and the Giants (1818) by John Hookham-Frere.

In The Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds (1818) John Keats refers (line 34) to Merlin's Hall.

Samor, Lord of the Bright City (1818) an epic poem in twelve books, by Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868) refers to Merlin, VIII 230-509. Arthur appears as an impetuous princeling in X, 195. See Chapter I, 23-25.

The Round Table, or King Arthur's Feast (1819) by T.L. Peacock (1785-1866) makes Arthur complain to Merlin, "When shall the Fates re-establish my reign/And spread my round table in Britain again?"

In Artegal and Elidure (1815, published 1820) Wordsworth refers to Merlin and Arthur.

In the tenth sonnet of Ecclesiastical Sonnets (1821, published 1822) Wordsworth refers to King Arthur bearing the image of the Virgin on his shield in battle.

Rogvald (1823), an epic poem in twelve books by J.F. Pennie (fl. 1830), refers in passing to Arthur, Book XI 5 and 32, though the action takes place in Saxon times. Like many blank verse works of the period it is interesting because at intervals the poet frees himself from Miltonic strains or eighteenth century diction and breaks into a simpler style similar to the best in Wordsworth.

In Poems Legendary, Incidental and Humorous (1825) John F. M. Dovaston (fl. ?) has The Elfin Bride, which tells of Merlin's journey to fairyland for the love of a fay. Wordsworth's The Egyptian Maid (1828, published 1835) is similar in its theme, and may have borrowed from Dovaston's work.

The Fabulous History or the Ancient Kingdom of Cornwall (1827) by Thomas Hogg (fl. ?) is a rhymed history of the Duchy and includes accounts of Lyonesse, Merlin and Vivien, and the story of Tristram, Iseult and Mark.

In the play Caswallon, or The Briton Chief (1829) C.E. Walker (fl. 1825) in Act II Scene I speaks of a princess sprung from ancient Arthur's royal line.

Morte d'Arthur (begun 1812, but first published in 1830) by Reginald Heber (1783-1826), an important attempt to revitalise Malory's story with a modern aim. See pages 19-22.

The Masque of Gwendolen (1816, first published 1830), also by Heber, deals with Merlin and other Arthurian characters. See page 23.

There is a sonnet To Morgan le Fay published in "The Literary Souvenir" for 1831. The author was J.F. Hollings (fl. ?)

In his Dedicatory Epistle (to Parnell's Poetical Works, republished in 1833), J. Mitford speaks of Milton "Musing on Merlin's art (his earliest theme, or Uther's son."

In The Pang More Sharp than All (1834) S.T. Coleridge refers to Merlin's mirror, derived ultimately from the Faerie Queene.

The Egyptian Maid, or The Romance of the Water Lily (1828, published 1835) by Wordsworth, has Merlin as villain and Galahad as hero. See pages 27-28.

Queen Guennivar's Round (Arthurian only in title) by R.S. Hawker, was published in 1841.

King Arthur (1848) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873). See page 29.

Sir Launfal (1848) by James Russell-Lowell (1819-1891). See pages 29-30.

Tristram and Iseult (1852) by Matthew Arnold. See pages 30-31.

In Sonnets on Anglo-Saxon History (1854) Lady Ann Hawkshaw refers, Sonnet XIII, to Merlin's wizardry, and laments the fact that he was born in pagan rather than in enlightened times.

The Doom-Well of St. Madron (1851, published 1855) by R.S. Hawker, is a fine original poem evoking the Arthurian.

The Chapel in Lyonesse by William Morris was first published in 1856. It was republished in The Defence of Guenevere (1858) which, apart from the poem on Guinevere's arguments at her trial, includes King Arthur's Tomb, Sir Galahad (A Christmas Mystery) and Near Avalon.

Queen Yseult (1857) was Swinburne's early response to the legend's appeal. The first part of the poem was published the same year, but the remaining five parts were not published until the Bonchurch edition in 1925. Two other poems of Swinburne's on the Arthurian theme at this time were also first published in 1925. These were the interesting Lancelot and Joyeuse Garde.

Arthur's Knights, (An Adventure from the Legend of the Sangrals (1859), is a slavish following of Malory in very uneven verse. Wisely the author remains anonymous.

King Arthur's Waes-Hael (1860) by R.S. Hawker, Arthurian only in title.

In The Quest of the Sangraal (1864) R.S. Hawker struck out anauthentic version of the Quest. Unfortunately the poem remains a fragment.

The Quest of the Sangreall (1868) by Thomas Westwood (? - 1888) follows Malory very unskilfully, imitates Tennyson's verse techniques, and borrows from Hawker's Grail poem also.

God's Graal (composed 1858, published 1911) is a fragment of nineteen lines by Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the Grail theme.

In The Song of Courtesy (composed 1859, published 1912) George Meredith (1828 - 1909) tells the story of Gawain's marriage to an ugly hag, who is transformed to a beautiful maiden when he kisses her. Meredith adds to the legend by making Gawain, after her transformation, out of pure courtesy give her the opportunity to refuse him.

In Acrostic to the River Camel (1868), published in Songs and Poems 1819-1879 (1881) J.R. Planche (1796-1880) refers to Merlin Morganna and Arthur.

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